

**WHATEVER HER LITTLE HEART DESIRES: HOW SOCIAL CLASS AND RACE
INFLUENCE ADOLESCENT GIRLS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE FUTURE**

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While girls today have more educational and career opportunities than ever before, their gender, social class, and racial positions influence how they set and achieve academic and career goals. Using feminist qualitative research methods, I conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews with 22 poor and working class, African American, white adolescent girls and 18 of their mothers to examine how patterns in everyday life influence girls' perceptions of the future. I begin by discussing who the girls are, focusing on how they see themselves in comparison to culturally constructed images of girls/girlhood, i.e., Girl Power and Mean Girl. I also show who they are by describing the organization of daily family life which includes such factors as television viewing, tight family ties and responsibilities, positive relationships with mothers, and an awareness of financial insecurity. I argue that an understanding of the cultural, familial, environmental, and material realities of the girls' lives illustrates how life for poor and working class girls is flooded with contradictions that they negotiate as they decide who they are and who they want to become. Then I discuss who the girls want to become and suggest that aspirations themselves are less important than the contexts in which aspirations are shaped. I illustrate how poor and working class girls' perceptions of the future are uniquely shaped in gendered, classed, and racialized practices within the media, family, peer groups, and schools. Finally, I discuss how the girls are reaching their goals. I argue that poor and working class girls' current

experiences and orientations and preparedness toward the future cannot be universalized. That is, the extent to which poor and working class girls find resources to help them plan and prepare for the future varies and these variations are illuminated when we examine girls' individual motivation as well as the resources families and schools differentially provide.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In American society, we are witnessing a media-induced preoccupation with the lives and experiences of girls. In the 1990's we heard stories and were provided academic research that suggested adolescent girls were "shortchanged," (AAUW, 1991) "silenced," (Pipher, 1994) and at risk of dropping levels of self-esteem (Orenstein, 1994/2000). Today, however, stories about girls are different, and quite contradictory. "Girls Rule!", they are empowered, academically successful, and achieving, "Whatever their little hearts desire." But at the same time, they have "Gone Wild," are "Mean," and some believe, resort to violence to make their mark on society. In many ways, these contemporary constructions of girlhood are uncomplicated and they often go unquestioned. More importantly, they create a common story about girls as if they all share the same experiences and have the same opportunities.

Undoubtedly, adolescent girls today have opportunities that earlier generations of women could not even imagine. Changing gender roles and advances for women in the workforce have fostered these opportunities. However, not all girls have equal access to these opportunities because some not only lack the information and resources they need to reach their goals, but they confront difficult and disabling life events that deter them from doing so. Much of the information adolescents use to form and reach their goals is derived from their own social location. Gender, social class, and race play a large role in shaping their childhood experiences as well as how they come to see their place in the larger, future world (Johnson, 2002).

Moreover, the experiences girls have in their daily lives, as well as their interactions with people in their families and schools and the media also shapes the amount and forms of resources (capital) they have to navigate the social institutions they encounter in their lives, including both educational and labor market systems (Lareau, 2003).

Like all girls, poor and working class girls confront conflicting messages about what it means to be a girl in American society but as they seek to take advantage of women and girls' newfound opportunities, their class and race can set them onto different paths than their white middle class counterparts. This project explores the current lives of poor and working class, white and African American girls from Southwestern Pennsylvania and how they perceive their futures. I examine one social group of girls to see how their interactions with people, culture, and the institutions of family and school affect who they currently are, want to be, and are likely to become. Using a qualitative approach, I examine the girls' daily lives, aspirations, and the resources they have to plan their education and careers and how these experiences shape their identities and worldviews.

The assertion that gender, race, and class play a role in influencing the outcomes of children's lives has been well confirmed. Scholars have shown that institutions such as schools systematically perpetuate inequalities in society (Bowles and Gintis, 1977, Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978), that adolescents adopt and resist their cultural surroundings, (Bettie, 2004, Kelley, 2004, MacLeod, 1987; Willis, 1977), and they learn and resist socially appropriate gender and class roles (Archer, 1985; Thorne, 1993; Orenstein, 2002; Massoni, 2004). These Reproduction theorists are interested in the ways dominant groups maintain power over others through socialization processes, cultural ideologies, and structural arrangements in society. They examine how individuals learn to accept that social rewards such as status and privilege are

earned in society as a direct result of individual “intelligence, talent, and effort” and see society’s arrangements as “legitimate” (Lareau, 2003: 275). These scholars have also acknowledged that individuals are active social agents with capabilities of resisting socialization, cultural, and structural barriers. For example, Paul Willis (1977) and Jay MacLeod’s (1987) influential studies of working class boys highlighted the complex interaction between the structure of institutions and individual agency. However, their work left out how girls experience reproduction as classed and racialized subjects.

More recent work begins to address the complex ways in which gender, class, and race simultaneously and individually constrain and empower girls. In her book, *Women Without Class: Gender, Race, and Identity*, Julie Bettie (2003) suggests that in light of changes in the global economy, women and girls are positioned in unique ways and ultimately experience class differently than their male counterparts. Moreover, as Bettie (2003: 194) suggests, diverse class experience derives from many factors making class not a “categorical given” but “fluid,” and “constantly recreated and co-created with processes of racialization and gender and sexual formation.”

In this project, I illuminate how poor and working class girls make sense of their material positions and perceive the possible outcomes of their material conditions. I argue that these girls’ mothers are the primary influence in helping them understand themselves and perceiving their futures. I suggest that class is not only generational, but that a new global economy and changing gender roles foster a unique experience for these girls. I also suggest that while the girls’ gender, race, and class positions intersect to create numerous contradictions as they plan and prepare for their future, they often learn to express themselves in individualistic ways. Finally, I show that while girls may share gender, social class, and racial backgrounds, the

pathways to reaching their goals negate their shared backgrounds. Consequently, I extend reproduction theory by showing a lack of homogeneity among girls who share a common class background as they plan and prepare for their futures.

The specific aspirations of girls are of minor importance in this study. Instead, I concentrate on how aspirations are formed and shaped. Jennifer Kerpelman and colleagues (2002: 290) adopt the term “possible selves” first used by Markus and Nurius (1986) to describe adolescents’ goals, who they hope or expect to become, and who they fear becoming. The possible self is created “within the day-to-day social contexts in which the adolescent lives” and these selves are validated and invalidated in daily experiences. Julie MacLeod and Lyn Yates (2006: 104) also discuss how adolescents’ futures are shaped: “Young people’s future thinking combines ideas about destinations (what sort of job I would like) and desires about becoming a certain type of person (who do I want to be)—these are not neatly separable orientations.” These researchers suggest that understanding how young people perceive their futures requires analyzing how youth is constructed in today’s society *and* how individual aspirations are formed in daily encounters with people, culture, and institutions.

Anita Harris (2004: 6) suggests that girls today grow up in a much different world than previous generations: “The making of modern global subjects has changed and young women have taken on a special role in the production of the late modern social order and its values.” In this chapter, I provide a framework for understanding contemporary poor and working class girlhood in Southwestern Pennsylvania. I begin by providing an overview of contemporary Western constructions of girlhood as well as a snapshot of local economic and labor market conditions to illustrate both the “discursive frameworks” and structural conditions that poor and working class girls in Southwestern Pennsylvania confront as they form their identities and plan

their futures (Bettie, 2003: 195). At the same time, I use reproduction theories to frame how social class and race influence their aspirations to illuminate how “inequality, advantage, and disadvantage are produced and might be changing” in current global economic times (MacLeod and Yates, 2006: 104). Finally, I examine the relationship between mothers and daughters and how larger, global economic changes impact mothers’ work experiences and opportunities. Mothers are a primary resource in girls’ future planning and I consider how vast social and economic changes during their lifetimes impact how they shape their girls’ identities and aspiration formations.

1.1 GIRLHOOD IN GLOBAL AND LOCAL CONTEXTS

In this section I examine the current constructions of American girlhood in a global capitalist society. Tying together the global and local, I discuss what constructions of girlhood mean for girls in the Southwestern Pennsylvania region. Finally, I show how girls have to negotiate vast changes in global and local economies as they plan their futures.

1.1.1 “Shortchanged” and Empowered Girls

The experiences of poor and working class girls, especially girls of color, have been trivialized in popular media and left out of popular discourse; they also are extremely understudied and undertheorized in academic literature (Bettie, 2003). As Julie Bettie (2003: 5) argues, much of the recent research about girls fails to “fully analyze the multiple social forces

that shape girls' lives and instead assumes a shared experience among girls." Bettie contends that social theory fails to conceptualize the social class location of poor and working class girls and that most studies of poor and working class youth historically focus on male subcultures. Research from such academics as Paul Willis (1977) and Jay MacLeod (1987) regard "work" as what men do in manual/blue collar wage labor. As Bettie (2003: 33) argues, leaving girls and women out of academic literature "renders [them] marginal as class subjects."

Racial analyses of girls' experiences also are missing in academic literature. In the few studies of poor and working class girls, the experiences of white girls tend to be considered the norm. According to Judith Rozie-Battle (2002), there is limited research about African American adolescent girls' psychosocial development, except in areas of teen pregnancy, nutrition, and physical activity. Similarly, Bonnie Leadbeater and Naibo Way (Leadbeater and Way, 2007: 2) suggest that studies conducted among urban African American girls "focus on risk statistics" that inhibit the understanding of the successes achieved by these girls against adverse circumstances. Perhaps this is why in 2001 the American Psychological Association introduced a Task Force on Adolescent Girls, calling for more research on girls of color (APA, 2001).

African American girls' lives do not seem to have much of an interest to the local public either. When I asked the Executive Director of A Place for Girls, a local community organization that serves African American adolescent girls, if researchers have expressed interest in studying their girls, she replied, "No, not really. You know, I don't think people really care much about our girls." Similarly, during a Steering Committee meeting of the Girls Coalition of Southwestern Pennsylvania, I learned of the need for research about local girls as several

members discussed the lack of quantitative and qualitative information on girls, especially from an intersectional framework that takes race, as well as social class and gender, into account.

In the early 1990's the plight of American girls gained attention when a number of alarming studies found girls to be "shortchanged," vulnerable, silenced, and losing self-esteem (AAUW, 1991; Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Orenstein, 1998; Pipher, 1994). Researchers illuminated a "crisis of girlhood" and suggested that girls were victimized by a male-dominated, patriarchal society (Gonick, 2006). While these writers brought academic and public attention to contemporary girls' issues by targeting a wide range of audiences including academics, school teachers, and parents, they have been highly criticized by more recent girlhood scholars for seeing girls "solely as victims," individualizing girls' problems, and universalizing girls experiences (Bettie, 2003: 4).

By complicating the experiences of girls and paying attention to girls' multiple subjectivities, newer scholars have begun to examine how girlhood is being constructed in late modern societies, a time of globalization and rapid social and economic change (Aapola, et. al. 2005; Driscoll, 2002; Gonick, 2006; Harris and Fine, 2004). These works regard the meaning of girlhood as shifting and fluid, affected by economic and social change, and intersecting with race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, and ability. Contemporary girls' scholars recognize not only how girls are vital to the global economy, but also how, as beneficiaries of second wave feminism, they are positioned in the economy in new ways.

Neoliberalism, defined by Marnina Gonick (2006) as the dismantling of the welfare state and social programs, cumulative effects of globalization of capitalism, changing labor processes and local labor markets, new technologies, changing family forms, and the feminization and racialization of poverty, has a direct impact on young girls. The dual labor market created by the

expansion of global capitalism divides workers into a primary sector, which includes workers who offer high skills in exchange for high wages and good working conditions, and those in the secondary sector—primarily women, whose labor is in demand but who possess limited skills, and who are offered low wages, little security, and poor health and safety conditions (Aapola, 2004). Workers in both sectors must be flexible, accustomed to lifelong learning and retraining, and “take personal responsibility for their economic security” (Aapola, 2005: 59).

Moreover, economic change is further exacerbated by educational reform that includes curriculum and training that meets industry needs and a growing emphasis on individualization and marketization (Aapola, 2005). Transitions into adulthood are more complex because a job market for young people with only minimum levels of education is virtually non-existent. This means that young people now are required to continuously upgrade their skills and make strategic educational and career choices with no guarantee of security in their professional or personal lives.

Girls have been targeted to meet the demands of the new economy. Sinnika Aapola and colleagues (2005: 62) argue: “This pressure on young people to become responsible for their own destiny is at the heart of the invention of the ‘new girl.’” Young women benefit from the new labor market as the growth of service jobs increases their opportunities for work and the decline of manufacturing jobs historically held by men puts women at an advantage. At the same time, a neo-liberal rhetoric of individualism, rational choice, and self-invention operates alongside a feminist discourse that parallels some of the same ideals, i.e., girls can be anything they want to be, can self-empower, and are no longer expected to be economically dependent on men. Aapola and colleagues (2005: 66) summarize girls’ position in the new economy: “Possibility, choice, and self-invention have become central ways in which young women are

able to think about their identities and futures within the new economy, and this is strongly encouraged by the market and the state.” As a result, the global economy helps empower girls, many of whom have increasingly attained higher education and training and broken down glass ceilings in professions. These new possibilities and outcomes for girls are captured under the rhetoric of *Girl Power*.

According to Marnina Gonick, *Girl Power* refers to a “complexity of cultural phenomena and social positioning” for girls that is neither consistent or static. *Girl Power* has roots in the early 1990’s movements of white and middle class girls, a large proportion identifying as queer. These girls, naming themselves as *Riot Grrls*, used *Girl Power* as a way of “reclaiming” youth, taking an anti-consumer stance, “distancing themselves from adults,” and embracing self-expression and female empowerment (Gonick, 2006: 7). As this *Girl Power* movement grew, Gonick argues, mainstream media co-opted and commercialized its ideals. Soon the *Girl Power* label was appropriated by the British pop band the *Spice Girls*, printed on T-shirts sold in places like WalMart, and used as themes in major motion pictures, cartoons, and television shows.

The inconsistent expression of *Girl Power*, from *Riot Grrls* to *Spice Girls*, has resulted in a debate over its uses and meanings. Some girls’ studies scholars and members of the general public see the discursive practices of *Girl Power* as mainstreaming feminism into the lives of young girls. Others regard *Girl Power* as a “commercialization of feminism,” “void of any feminist content,” presented as an alternative to feminism, and an apolitical stance (Gonick, 2006: 10). In all these usages, *Girl Power* suggests that all girls today are empowered and social class and race distinctions are ignored.

Anita Harris (2004: 66) is among several girls’ studies scholars to recognize that new opportunities in education and the global economy are not “equally available to” nor are they

“equally valued by” all young girls. She uses the labels “*Can-do*” and “*At-risk*” to explain how social class and race shape different experiences, opportunities, and outcomes for girls in the new global economy. *Can-do* girls epitomize *Girl Power*; they are flexible, self-actualized, confident, resilient, and empowered. They are encouraged to be independent, make strategic education and career choices, delay motherhood (but not too long), and consume. Drawing from the work of Angela McRobbie (2000), Harris (2004: 19) illustrates, “The signs of their success are glamorous careers, luxurious consumer lifestyles, financial independence, and high standards of physical beauty” resulting in *Can-do* girls “uncomplainingly participating in meeting the needs of the marketplace.” *Can-do* girls are most often white and middle class and are *supposed* to succeed. If they do not, they can turn to a plethora of resources to help reinvent themselves, “develop internal resilience, strength, and self-belief” (Harris, 2004: 33). *Can-do* girls are constructed as “never-good-enough” girls who must perpetually observe and remake themselves (Harris, 2004: 33).

The opposite of *Can-do* girls are *At-risk* girls, who can’t or won’t achieve the same career success or glamorous consumer lifestyles. While all girls are expected to invoke *Girl Power*, most *At-risk* girls do not, and as a result, their behaviors become a moral preoccupation of the government, media, and education systems. *At-risk* girls are seen as failures and their problems viewed as circumstantial: they are victims of poverty, broken homes and bad parenting, violence in the community, and susceptibility to drugs and alcohol. While institutional solutions, including juvenile detention centers, schools, social programs, and the welfare system attempt to save *At-risk* girls through close observance, surveillance, and efforts to keep them on track, the mere label of *At-risk* both “dramatizes and individualizes” their problems and shapes them as “failures in the making.” *At-risk* girls are often members of poor and minority groups whose

structural disadvantage gets framed as “poor personal choice, laziness, and incompetent family practices” (Harris, 2004: 25). The *At-risk* label places the focus on girls’ individual attitudes and skills/competencies and constructs these girls as jeopardized. Those *At-risk* girls who do succeed under these circumstances are held up as success stories in which all girls in their communities should aspire. Even more problematic is that *At-risk* girls’ failure gets cast as “misaligned ambitions” or “a combination of family, community, and personal limitations” i.e., individual problems rather than a matter of structural disadvantage (Harris, 2004: 26).¹ As Harris (2004: 188) suggests, a “success trajectory” characterized by continuous self-invention, a good career, a family, and responsible citizenship has become normalized and mainstreamed as the expected transition to adulthood but current social and economic conditions do not support these possibilities for all young girls.

In this study, I define *Girl Power* as a set of discursive practices that refer to girls as empowered, self-reliant, personally responsible, in control of their destinies, and that positions girls as having gained parity with boys, or as surpassing boys academically and in the workforce. I use the mainstreamed version of *Girl Power* that Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mikel Brown (2006) illustrate in their book, *Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters From Marketers’ Schemes* which focuses on how the media and marketers use *Girl Power* images to sell music and fashion, teach girls to shop, and encourage girls to choose accessorizing, sex appeal, and boyfriends over relationships with other girls. I argue that under the guise of *Girl Power*, girls are exposed to

¹ Harris (2004) refers to Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and Barbara Schneider (2000) whose work suggests that at-risk kids suffer from “misaligned ambitions” or uncertainty with career goals and educational requirements for jobs and they can’t make plans for meeting their goals because they lack knowledge about education and career pathways—all of which are attributed by Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider to “a combination of family, community, and personal limitations” (26). But, as Harris (2004) argues, what Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider fail to take into account as they attribute success and failure to individual strategic efforts, is the large extent to which material and cultural resources matter in young people’s ability to shape the future. Instead, failure is framed as individual choice.

stereotypical forms of femininity and consumerism, their experiences are cast as universal, and girls are presented with limited options of who they are and can be. I show how this is especially damaging for poor and working class girls who, as Harris (2004) argues, often lack the economic means to be empowered in education and the labor market and face structural disadvantages within their schools and communities.

In addition to *Girl Power* images, contemporary girlhood is also framed under the newer rhetoric of *Mean Girl*. *Mean Girl*, a negative outcome of *Girl Power*, depicts girls as having taken their empowerment to destructive levels. *Mean Girl* is used to describe girls as clique-forming, bullying, and verbally assertive, and for some girls, physically aggressive. *Mean Girls* are girls who assert their independence and individualism at the expense of others, connive, manipulate, and ostracize other girls for their own benefit. As Marnina Gonick (2004: 396) suggests, *Mean Girl* rhetoric is used to capture “the nastiness, viciousness, and back-stabbing [supposedly] integral to girls’ friendships.”

Mean Girl rhetoric has several effects on girls. First, suggesting that being mean is a natural part of adolescent girlhood fails to acknowledge the particularities of current social and economic times in which girls live (Gonick, 2004). Second, representing meanness as an inherent part of girlhood suggests that girls themselves “produce these behaviors” rather than seeing their behaviors as “strategies for negotiating the particular times and place in which girls are living,” ignoring differences between girls’ lives and the power they express in resisting *Mean Girl* rhetoric (Gonick, 2004: 397). Finally, as Gonick suggests, *Mean Girl* rhetoric is about more than girls’ relationships with other girls. It illustrates larger “social anxieties” about complex economic and social changes taking place in the world today, including the rise of neoliberalism and the production of autonomous, self-making citizens. Gonick (2004: 398)

concludes, “The frameworks for making sense of girls, the aggression and competition within their friendships, are premised on privatized solutions to social and political problems.”

According to Gonick (2004: 397), while seemingly oppositional to shortchanged girl discourses, *Mean Girl* rhetoric shares common themes with it. Both depict a crisis in girlhood; in both, public attention is targeted at parents, especially mothers; and both types of girls are depicted as vulnerable. Moreover, both are explained in biological and individualistic ways: “Such explanations rely on understandings of girlhood as a universal, biologically grounded condition of female experience which is supported in western contexts by truisms such as teenaged girls are hormonally driven, peer oriented, lacking in self-esteem, and identity seeking.”

Like *Girl Power*, *Mean Girl* rhetoric universalizes girls, i.e., they are all mean. But a closer look at media and popular culture depictions of girls as mean reveals differences in how poor and working class, white and minority girls are portrayed. Middle class white girls are mean by gossiping, ostracizing, and manipulating their peers. Poor and working class, white and minority girls are cast as “Violent”, creating increased social anxiety over their behaviors.²

How do girls in a specific local context—with specific economic and social conditions—negotiate these contemporary constructions of girlhood? As Julie Bettie (2003: 195) suggests, “Examining the process of identity formation, the ways in which girls construct themselves and are constructed by discourse” helps illuminate the cultural discourses they “tap into to narrate their identities”. As Bettie shows, and I will highlight throughout, because girls are presented with limited critical discourses about unequal structural arrangements in society, especially as they pertain to class inequity, they draw from limited and often “depoliticized” discourses of girlhood that work to legitimize “hierarchies of inequality”. In the next section, I situate the

² A more thorough discussion of how *Girl Power* and *Mean Girl* rhetoric pertain to poor and working class, white and African American girls is taken up in Chapter Three.

girls in this study by providing an overview of local economic and social conditions to show the local structural disadvantages poor and working class, white and African American girls face as they plan and prepare for their futures. In the section following that, I connect the global and local by illustrating how both shape the multiple subjectivities of girls.

1.1.2 The Local Economy and Girls

The Pittsburgh region has undergone massive economic changes over the last 30 years with a significant decline in the steel mill industry and a rise in service, medical, and high technology employment. Many of the girls in this study live in areas most affected by the decline of the steel industry and the impact of that decline continues to be felt in their families and communities. The region is also faced with several other challenging workforce issues including an aging workforce, a “brain drain” or the loss of young, educated persons to other states and regions for work, and a mismatch between the skills of the current workforce and the skills needed to fill employment vacancies. The Pittsburgh region is home to over 35 colleges and universities resulting in a highly educated young labor force, many of whom find themselves underemployed or unable to find work in the region. Most jobs “in-demand” in the region require some form of post-secondary education or training but not a college degree, meaning there are few opportunities for people in this region who only possess a high school diploma and few opportunities even for those who possess a college degree.

Women and minorities tend to be among those who experience the brunt of unstable local economic and social conditions in the region. For example, while women in the Pittsburgh area currently have above average labor force participation and employment rates compared to women in the nation, fewer have full time jobs; more work part time (Bangs, et. al., 2004).

Moreover, female workers in the region are nearly the lowest paid women in urban America. They also face a higher gender-wage gap compared to other urban areas, earning less than 70% of the annual earnings of full-time male workers (Bangs, et. al., 2004). Finally, the highest rates of employment for women in the region are in food preparation and service and office and administrative support, traditionally female dominated occupations characterized by low-levels of job security, part-time employment, and low wages.

The local employment situation is even less viable for African American women. In comparison to 50 other major metropolitan areas, African American women with children in the Pittsburgh area have lower employment rates (Bangs, et. al., 2004). In 2000, the median earnings for African American women were approximately \$24,000 a year, \$10,000 less than those of whites, positioning these women among the lowest paid African American women in the country. With above average rates of unemployment and nearly the lowest earned wages, African American women in the Pittsburgh metropolitan area also have above average poverty rates for the nation (Bangs, et. al., 2004). Black poverty rates are three times that of whites in Pittsburgh region (Bangs, et. al, 2004).

Women in the region have higher levels of education than women in the nation but African American youth have lower levels of reading and math proficiency and are less likely to earn high school diplomas and college degrees than are white youth. Similar to findings from national studies, African American girls are more likely to earn high school diplomas and college degrees than their male counterparts.

In addition to disparities in the labor market and education systems, housing in the region is highly racially segregated, resulting in serious implications for communities which are often already disadvantaged. Little investment goes into poor Black communities and schools, so

young people living in these communities have to contend with high crime rates and limited resources.

The Pittsburgh region is a prime example of how local areas are impacted by changes in global economic and social conditions. Steel industry jobs (middle class paying jobs that require low education and skills) have been replaced by some high tech but more service sector jobs (low-paying jobs that are unstable and require minimal skills) and while women are increasingly meeting these workforce demands, they are still concentrated in traditionally feminine jobs, receive lower pay, and perform more part-time work. Changing family forms are also evident in the region with a rise in single-headed female families and feminization and racialization of poverty. Racial segregation in communities and the workforce has harmful implications for African Americans living here.

These are the local structural conditions with which girls must contend as they plan their education and career paths. In the new economy, girls are expected to be self-determinant, individualistic, and personally responsible for overcoming structural barriers. Yet coupled with global economic changes, local economic changes and social conditions have a tremendous impact on the futures of girls who live here. At the same time as these economic changes are happening, ideologies that girls can be anything and have it all are being thrown about in popular media. If local girls buy into these ideals of individualism and personal responsibility how will they fare in a labor market that clearly discriminates against them? If girls are not successful in the labor market, will the local community and the girls themselves see them as failures? While I cannot predict the futures of these girls or how their future labor market experiences, I do show how contemporary discursive practices of girlhood influence their identities and how they see themselves in the future. I also show that local economic conditions have influenced their

families' material positions, their parents' work histories, and their communities, which ultimately informs girls' perceptions of self and the future.

1.2 CONNECTING THE GLOBAL, LOCAL, AND INDIVIDUAL

In this study, I examine social class reproduction by looking at how adolescent girls' subjectivities are formed. I am interested in who girls think they are, who they want to become, and how they will get there. In the previous sections, I established that larger economic and social changes, as well as local economic and social conditions shape both girls' subjectivities and the opportunities available for them. In this section, I discuss research that illustrates that subjectivity is not only shaped by global and local conditions but also by girls' social location—their gender, social class, and race, as well as their daily interactions and experiences with people, media, and institutions.

1.2.1 Identity and Subjectivity

In *Making Modern Lives: Subjectivity, Schooling, and Social Change*, Julie MacLeod and Lyn Yates (2006: 38) define identity as “how young people see themselves—their more self-conscious identifications and self-identity as a particular person.” Identity is who girls think they are, in terms of “personality” and “in relation to standard sociological categories.” As a way to gauge girls' sense of self, I asked them to talk about who they are, what they do everyday, with whom they interact, and what's important to them. Understanding who girls think they are gives insight to who they think they can become and how they think they will get there. Moreover,

identities are formed in complex ways and people narrate a self by discussing who they are and who they are not in relation to others in gendered, classed, and racialized ways (Byrne, 2006; Lamont, 2000).

Adolescence is often characterized as a time when individuals are incessantly thinking about and shaping their sense of self (Alfieri, et.al., 1996; Chavous, et. al., 2003). For example, the transition to junior high school is a time when individuals are more motivated to learn about gender, have their current gender beliefs challenged, and gather new information about gender roles (Thomas, et. al., 1996). During adolescence, class identity development is shaped by familial and social relations, as well as leisure and consumption practices (Bettie, 2002). Racial identity also is complicated in adolescence because African American adolescents are more likely to be “actively engaged” in exploring their racial identity than whites (Tatum, 1997: 53). That is, African American children often take in values and beliefs of the dominant White culture, adopt Eurocentric cultural values, and learn to contend with the realities of racism. However, not all African American children struggle with racial identity to the same degree. As Beverly Tatum (1993: 55) suggests, African American children raised by more “racially conscious parents,” learn to minimize or reduce the impact of the dominant culture.

While examining girls’ identities tells us something about who they are, employing the term “subjectivity” complicates identity formation by indicating that identities are not a given; rather, they are fluid, multiple, and contextual, “mediated by multiple historical and contemporary factors” including interactions with people, culture, and institutions (MacLeod and Yates, 2006: 38). I use the term subjectivity to suggest that ‘subjects’ are formed through a “range of influences, practices, experiences, and relations” (MacLeod and Yates, 2006: 38). As I

will show, it is through a combination of these that girls begin to define themselves and their future goals.

Studying subjectivity informs us of the multiple factors that influence girls' perceptions of the future. In this study, I prioritize the influence of mothers, but also consider how peers, families, other adult influences, schools, and organizations shape girls' sense of who they are and who they think they can become. I show that within these contexts, girls have personal influences—they have conversations with people about the future and are influenced by people around them modeling behaviors and attitudes about work. Culture also influences girls' ideas about who they can become. Media—as it is used by poor and working class families, and its content—inform what kinds of possibilities are available for girls. It is primarily through families, media, and schools that girls' perceptions of what they can be are shaped. From these institutions, girls not only learn important values about work but also find necessary resources to help them plan and prepare for their futures. Moreover, within these institutions, social inequalities are produced and reproduced.

1.2.2 Reproduction

Messages from people and media tell girls they can be anything they want to be, most Americans describe themselves as middle class (Brantlinger, 2002), and many white people do not believe that race can profoundly shape life chances (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). These are a part of the American Dream, premised on the notion that hard work and determination are all an individual needs to take advantage of opportunities. Its ideals of individualism, free choice, and personal responsibility are perpetuated by major institutions in society, including the government, economy, media, schools, and family and help mask social inequalities.

Reproduction theory helps to understand how girls become certain people and perceive themselves as becoming certain people in the future. Reproduction scholars have shown that institutions such as families and schools present systematic barriers to social mobility in the form of material and ideological practices, the development cultural styles and attitudes in relation or adaptation to their social and economic position (Bourdieu, 1984; Lareau, 2003; Johnson, 2002; MacLeod, 1987; Willis, 1977), and through ideologies of individualism, meritocracies, and personal responsibility. These institutional practices mask the hierarchies and power imbalances between dominant and subordinate groups (Brantlinger, 2003).

Borrowing from reproduction theorists, I focus on three forms of capital to explain how social class is reproduced including economic, social, and cultural capital. Economic capital refers to the monetary resources girls and their families have to reach their goals. Limited financial resources have huge implications for poor and working class adolescent girls planning their futures, especially during a time of competitive schooling in which upper and middle class parents are paying for school advantage. I use social capital to refer to the people who can help girls and their mothers reach their goals. I show that the social capital of poor and working class girls and their mothers is limited because they often do not know people who are specifically informed about their career goals. Finally, I use the term cultural capital to refer to the knowledge girls and their mothers have to guide them through educational and labor market systems and explore the types and amounts of cultural capital possessed and activated by girls and their families.

Reproduction theories also help to understand how individuals take on an outlook, mentality, and orientation to the social world around them (MacLeod and Yates, 2006). Pioneering the term “habitus,” Bourdieu (1984) explained that children learn forms of

knowledge, language, tastes, and perceptions in the home and activate these as cultural capital in educational and labor market institutions. MacLeod and Yates (2006: 99) use Bourdieu's definition of habitus to show how "in subtle ways through discourses, practices, institutions and interactions with others in their environment, principles are set up for adolescents about what matters, what is noticed, and how one acts." However, they extend Bourdieu's work to suggest that "habitus is not imposed, nor is it fixed, nor is it a simple mentality," it is an accumulation of dispositions that individuals learn from families, schools, and community milieus.

In this study, I use MacLeod and Yates' definition of habitus and focus on what girls say matters in their daily lives, the messages they receive from adults in their homes and schools about what is supposed to matter, and how they are being taught to act. I explore the similarities and contradictions between the habituses that are being shaped among these poor and working class girls and the dominant discourses, specifically those of empowered girls and the American Dream, that tell girls who they are supposed to become. I look at the ways gender, social class, and racial locations contribute to habitus formation and how mothers in particular play a key role in shaping the subjectivity of their daughters.

1.3 MOTHERS' UNIQUE ROLE IN SHAPING DAUGHTERS

Numerous studies on parenting suggest that mothers play *the* primary role not only in rearing their children but also steering their educational decisions (Byrne, 2006; Griffith and Smith, 2005; Hays, 1996; Lareau, 2003). Because mothers are so influential, and because traditional gender roles are changing in this new economy and have drastically changed in mother's own lifetimes, I chose to examine how mothers influence their daughters' educational

decisions and work values. Although I could not measure the long-term impacts of mothers' influences, I asked girls and mothers about messages regarding work as well as how mothers modeled work behaviors. I paid special attention to how mothers' experiences impacted their own lives and in turn shaped what they told their daughters, how they helped their girls connect with and take advantage of available resources, and how girls formed their perceptions about their own futures in relation to their mothers. In this section, I consider how changing gender roles impact the lives of poor and working class women and in turn, influence what they tell their daughters about their futures. I also discuss how poor and working class, white and African American mothers help their daughters plan for the future. Finally, I discuss the relationships between mothers and daughters to illustrate the strong influence mothers have over their daughters' career perceptions, planning, and preparedness.

1.3.1 Changing Gender Roles

Jennifer Kerpelman and colleagues (2002) suggest that girls' career aspirations are profoundly influenced by their mothers' expectations. Moreover, they suggest that girls derive their ideas about potential careers in tandem with ideas about their future lives as wives and mothers, which are exemplified by their own mothers. Therefore, it is important to understand how changing gender roles influence mothers' expectations and strategies for helping their daughters plan and reach their goals.

Education and career opportunities have changed tremendously for girls today in comparison to the opportunities available to their mothers. Changed economic, work, and familial conditions have impacted the lives of mothers and these changes play out in the lives of their girls. Most of the mothers in my study were in their forties. When they were forming their

own aspirations in the 1970s' and 1980's, women's labor force participation rate was about 45%, the female to male earnings ratio was about 59%, and occupational sex-segregation was only beginning to legally be addressed (Padavic and Reskin, 2002). Moreover, the average age for marriage was 20 and the age women had their first child was 21. Today, women's labor force participation rate is about 75%, the male to female earnings ratio is currently around 72%, and more women have entered non-traditional occupations (Padavic and Reskin, 2002). Women marry later, at an average age of 25, and the average age for first child is 26. Divorce rates have also increased tremendously as well as single-parenthood. Yet studies of the effects of socioeconomic status and status attainment usually focus on the influence of father's occupation and income (Simpson, 2003) and ignore how mothers' work (in and outside of the home) and their messages about work, influences daughters' aspirations and perceptions of the future.

Several authors suggest that middle class girls today are beneficiaries of the changing work roles of their mothers (Aapola, et. al., 2005; Harris, 2004; MacLeod and Yates, 2006; Walkerdine, 2003,). In Dan Kindlon's (2005: 70), book, *Alpha Girls: The New American Girl and How She is Changing the World*, 70% of the girls had mothers who worked outside the home, as stockbrokers, attorneys, biochemists, and in other professions. He argues that "many girls need look no further than their own family for examples of self-assertive, independent women with dynamic, fulfilling careers." While his analysis of changing and contemporary gender roles is problematic because he neglects class and racial differences, he illustrates well the ways in which white women's inroads into traditionally male dominated professions have changed the ways middle class white girls perceive their future possibilities in relation to their mothers. Similarly, Amy MacLeod and Lyn Yates (2006) suggest that the emphasis on individuality and achievement in middle class life has had profound impacts not only on middle

class girls' daily lives, but also on the ways they conceptualize their futures. Research has substantiated that middle class girls' perceive aspirations in relation to their mothers' position in the workforce and home (Kindlon, 2005; MacLeod and Yates, 2006) but less is known about how poor and working class girls receive their mothers' messages and modeling of work.

Poor and working class women have historically had higher labor force participation rates than middle class women and have worked in low-status and low-wage jobs. Because of discrimination against African American men and a greater likelihood of single-parenthood, African American women have had considerably higher labor force participation rates than white women. For poor and working class white and African American women, balancing work and family is not new. However, today there are more lucrative education and career opportunities available to their daughters, yet because poor and working class mothers have not experienced these opportunities, they often find difficulty finding the resources necessary to help their daughters reach their goals.

1.3.2 How Mothers Help Girls Plan

This study was inspired in part, by efforts of the Mon Valley Education Consortium (MVEC), a local non-profit organization that conducts an annual survey of middle school students in 26 school districts asking them about their career aspirations and resources. Most of the students surveyed in MVEC's study are from working class school districts and these students overwhelmingly and consistently list mothers as their primary source of career information. In an effort to better understand the role played by poor and working class mothers, I consider the types of resources and the knowledge of career trajectories that they have to help their daughters plan for the future.

Mothers perceive themselves as being highly involved in supporting their daughters and conversely, daughters perceive a high level of support from their mothers (Simpson, 2003). But mothers' level of education and work experiences makes a difference in the kinds of strategies they use to assist daughters. For example, poor and working class women may not know individuals in the professional fields to which their daughters aspire (social capital) and because they have not attended higher institutions of education, may be unaware of the processes of getting into college. As Jennifer Kerpelman and colleagues (2003) show in their study of mother-daughter relationships, mothers without college degrees rely more heavily on "global strategies" i.e., providing support and encouragement through advice than those with college degrees who practiced more concrete strategies in helping their daughters plan and prepare for their futures, i.e., helping them with homework, finding scholarship information, and gaining knowledge about majors and fields to which their children aspire. Because poor and working class mothers often lack knowledge and experience in planning for the kinds of jobs to which their daughters aspire, they may have difficulty helping their daughters in practical ways and instead view themselves more as emotionally supportive. Moreover, as Costigan and colleagues (2007) suggest, in addition to providing emotional support for career planning, African American mothers with limited education and low-status and paying jobs are also especially concerned with making sure that their daughters become economically self-sufficient and independent. As they suggest, "This independence training by African American mothers is likely a key protective factor that fosters resilience in young African American females in the face of multiple risks" (179).

When mothers lack the resources they need to help their daughters plan, they may rely on institutions outside of the family. In a study of poor, working class, and middle class mothers'

involvement in their child's schooling Annette Lareau (2003) found that poor and working class white parents typically rely on school officials to shape education and career-decision making. Lareau refers to a white working class mother who is dealing with her child's learning disability and says, "Ms. Driver wants the best possible outcome for her daughter and she does not know how to achieve that goal without relying heavily on Wendy's teachers" (2003: 198). While Lareau found that white mothers in her study often deferred to the school for guidance and relied on the school to send their child down the best possible path, African American mothers were more reluctant to rely as heavily on the school as a resource because typically as students, they experienced "overbearing authority" and discriminatory practices in their own education (218). Clearly there are race-based differences in the kinds of resources poor and working class mothers have available in helping their daughters plan and prepare for their futures. Nonetheless, even though these mothers may lack resources to help their daughters plan, they still play a vital influential role in their daughters' lives.

1.3.3 Daughter-Mother Relationships

Media often portrays adolescent girls as emotional, irrational, and stress-ridden. On television we see young girls rebelling against their parents, fighting with other girls, and obsessing over relationships with boys. Movies like *Mean Girls* (2004) based on the book *Queenbees and Wannabees* by Rosalind Wiseman (2003) and Lifetime Movie Channel's premier of *Odd Girl Out* based on the same-titled book by Rachel Simmons (2003) help to perpetuate an image of white girls who establish pecking orders, run in cliques, exclude other girls, and bully just as frequently and perhaps more detrimentally than boys. The media images of African American adolescent girls are just as negative. We see them as sassy, defiant, and threatening, if

we see them at all. These same girls, who can't get along with their female peers, can't get along with their mothers either. Repeatedly, daughter-mother relationships are portrayed as conflictual, and we see girls yelling and screaming at their mothers, saying things like "I hate you!" or "You are ruining my life!" Not only are these media portrayals of adolescent girls unpleasant, they are also inaccurate.

Terri Apter (1990: 107), a feminist and child psychologist, challenges the negative ways in which daughter-mother relationships have been portrayed. She argues that girls do not resent their mothers but instead seek to maintain closeness with them, and gain their support and approval, while simultaneously constructing and testing out new identities. The daughter-mother relationship is not conflictual in the sense that the media portrays it, but characterized by girls seeking affirmation and validation from their mothers because mothers' responses "bear the greatest and most credible weight."

Similarly, Jacqueline Simpson (2003: 291) suggests that there are few studies that document daughter-mother relationships among African American women and those studies that do tend to focus on troubled relations among at-risk female adolescents and their mothers. Contesting portrayals of troubled and conflicting daughter-mother relationships, Simpson suggests that for African American girls, being connected to others, especially mothers, may be particularly critical for facilitating their abilities to perceive their future selves. Also studying the relationships between African American mothers and daughters, KaaVonia Hinton-Johnson (2004) offers three themes that shape African American mother-daughter relationships including socialization, distance, and conflict. In terms of socialization, she suggests that while African American mothers socialize their daughters to be independent, self-confident, and economically self-sufficient, they do so in a society where they are often devalued. Therefore, African

American mothers often find themselves having to protect their daughters as they simultaneously teach them to be autonomous. This can be problematic when African American mothers and daughters are often physically and emotionally distant. That is, physical distance is often created by the necessity of mothers working in full-time jobs and/or long hours which is often felt emotionally by girls and may lead conflict between African American mothers and daughters. While research on the “types of strategies that African American mothers are using to promote daughters’ attainment of their desired academic and career selves and how daughters perceive their mothers help” is limited (291), Simpson argues that mothers’ expectations have a direct impact on what daughters expect for themselves and that African American girls place a great emphasis on relying on people close to them to engage in strategies to help them reach their goals.

1.4 SUMMARY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Since the early 1990’s, discursive practices that construct girls as shortchanged, empowered (*Girl Power*) and mean (*Mean Girl*) have shaped public perceptions and girls’ own perceptions of themselves. These labels rely on traditional notions of femininity and position girls as subjects of scrutiny, and benefiting and failing in a global capitalist society. When girls are framed and studied under these labels, their experiences are often universalized. What is missing in media portrayals, public perceptions, and academic studies of girls is how girls take up *and* resist these cultural constructions of girlhood and how their varying social locations empower or disempower them to do so.

In the Pittsburgh area, quantitatively or qualitatively, we know little about our girls. The research that exists is limited to considerations of either gender or race but not both and focuses on “at-risk” behaviors rather than the education and career trajectories of youth. Moreover, this research is quantitative and omits the qualitative meanings and understandings girls attribute to their experiences.

We also know little about daughter and mother relationships as they pertain to planning and preparing for the future. Historically, mobility studies have examined father’s education and career and ignored that of mothers’ and mothers’ primary role in shaping their daughters’ futures. Moreover, most reproduction studies have focused on working class boys’ cultures and left out the experiences of poor and working class girls. As the new global capitalist economy promotes changing gender roles in the family and offers more opportunities to girls regardless of social class and racial background, it is imperative to know more about how poor and working class girls create and activate their own forms of social and cultural capital and how mothers help their daughters plan and prepare for the future. Moreover, because all children view mothers as their primary source of career information and mothers have the most influence over their children’s education and career planning it is not only important to know more about daughter-mother relationships in general, but also how class and race intersect to form unique relationships and to influence mothers’ abilities to help their daughters reach their goals.

In this study, I examine the ways girls/girlhood is shaped through narratives about what girls are supposed to be in a global capitalist society and how these discursive practices are mediated through girls’ daily experiences (Bettie, 2003). I suggest that not only are girls identities formed through these narratives and experiences, but who they want to become and how they are beginning to attain their goals also include a negotiation of these narratives and

their daily experiences. To better understand the current lives and future perceptions of poor and working class, white and African American girls in Southwest Pennsylvania, I ask the following questions: How do cultural discourses of girlhood shape poor and working class girls' sense of self? How do family, schools, and community culture impact who girls think they are and who they think they can become? How do mothers help their daughters plan for the future and what information and capital—economic, social, and cultural—do they provide to their daughters? How and when do gender, social class, and race influence girls' perceptions and preparation for the future?

2.0 STUDY DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

In this chapter, I discuss the challenges and dilemmas of doing research with youth. I begin by recognizing some of the unique issues that confront youth researchers as they conceptualize their projects. I then briefly explain my Master's thesis which provides methodological background to this study. Throughout these sections, I discuss how in designing this study, I negotiated between feminist research ethics, external influences from the IRB, and the organization where I worked.³ I then discuss methods of data collection. Finally, I discuss my intentions for disseminating the findings of this study.

2.1 RESEARCHING YOUTH

In her book, *Researching Youth: Methodological Issues in Critical Youth Studies*, Amy Best (2006) suggests that while much attention has been paid to methodological concerns in researching adults and marginalized adult groups, less attention has been paid to the methodological dynamics that occur in research with youth. As she states, age intersects with other identities and other “axes of power and difference” and has consequences for research

³ For further discussion of the difficulties I confronted with IRB policies and procedures, see Appendix A “No Kids Allowed!!!: How IRB Ethics Undermine Qualitative Researchers from achieving Socially Responsible Ethical Standards.” This paper has been accepted for the Spring edition of Race, Gender, and Class Special Edition: Socializing Our Youth.

practice (4). Analyzing age as a factor that intersects with gender, race, social class and other identities enables the researcher to better explore the dynamics of the research process. Taft (2006: 223) also argues that adult researchers who study youth often assume they know “what it means to be a teenager today.” This assumption undoubtedly reflects the research process and “reinscribes the power of adults to define what youth are like and what they should be like.” As a result, researchers are obligated to reflect upon how age functions during the research process. In this project, I did my best to understand young people as capable of negotiating their own lives, making decisions for themselves, and as “reflexive social agents and producers of culture” (Best, 2006: 11). Through each stage of the research process, I examined how my identity as a white, 32 year-old female, middle class (but with working class roots) researcher impacted the research process.

This project examines how class and race influence adolescent girls’ perceptions of what is possible for them in the future and the roles mothers play in shaping their daughters’ futures. According to MacLeod and Yates (2006: 25) policymakers interested in the aspirations of young people tend to focus on the “rational and instrumental steps” of career pathways, transitions, and choices. Data used to inform policy around youth career decision-making are often based on quantitative research such as the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. Decision-making based solely on quantitative studies is problematic because it does not give insight to the “ways young people project, reflect on, and negotiate their own biography, revisiting their dreams, their values, and their sense of who they are and who they want to be” (MacLeod and Yates, 2006: 25). While quantitative and qualitative methods should not be seen as dualistic or at odds (Demaris, 2001), I chose qualitative methods as a way to hear what girls say about themselves, their familial experiences, their interactions with peers, their interpretations of the media, and

their feelings about school. This provides a different way of seeing “pathways” by illuminating how girls make meaning of their lives and experiences and how these meanings shape their ideas of who they are and who they can become (MacLeod and Yates, 2006: 8).

2.2 MASTER’S THESIS/BACKGROUND

In May of 2004, I completed a master’s thesis that examined how gender and social class shape adolescent career aspirations. The study focused primarily on white students from a school district, which I deemed “working class” based on its median family income, parental education and occupation, and the percent of students eligible for free and reduced lunch programs. This study was motivated by work done by the Mon Valley Education Consortium (MVEC), a local agency that provides career literacy services to kids in 26 school districts in Southwestern PA. MVEC implements an annual survey asking middle-school students about their career aspirations and planning resources. In the quantitative part of my thesis, I analyzed some of the data collected in the MVEC survey for eighth graders in the same district, including gender differences in the types of occupations to which students aspire and the types of career information resources students use. I supplemented MVEC data with qualitative data collected by conducting 3 focus groups with eighth graders; two consisted of 4-6 girls and one consisted of 6 boys. In addition, because the MVEC survey revealed that students cite mothers as their primary source of career information, I included individual interviews with 7 mothers to learn more about their roles as information and resource providers.

In my Master’s thesis project I worked with a local school district to recruit participants and collect data. Studying young people in a school setting proved to be quite complicated as I

had to go through numerous hurdles to gain access to the students, in addition to onerous IRB procedures which will be discussed shortly. The school required that my study was approved by the assistant superintendent, superintendent, and the school board; that my interview questions be approved by the school psychologist; and that I agree that the middle school guidance counselor be present during the focus groups.

I wanted my dissertation project to extend my Master's thesis by including a more racially diverse sample of poor and working class girls. To do this, I tried to recruit students from a different school district that served a more diverse population. I had the study approved by the middle school principal and guidance counselor but could not gain approval from the school board. Curious why the school board would deny my project, I spoke with several school personnel and other educational researchers and learned that schools today are reluctant to allow individual researchers into their buildings for several reasons, stemming mostly from new accountability measures to which they are subject. For example, since Pennsylvania schools administer state standardized tests, teachers spend an abundant amount of time preparing students for the tests, so they do not have time to respond to the demands of researchers. In addition, schools are being held accountable for delivering education equally to all students so school boards may fear that researchers might expose indiscrepancies or injustices in their education delivery.

After being denied access to students in a school setting I decided the best method of recruitment would be through a community organization. However, I took methodological lessons learned from my Master's thesis and applied them to this project. For example, I changed the sample to include a more diverse population of girls. I also determined that it was crucial not to have an adult present in the interview because I knew from experience that adults

can interfere with the interviewing. Finally, reflecting on the interview questions I asked in my Master's thesis, I decided to include longer, more in-depth interviews with girls so that in addition to their school experience, I could analyze other variables (parental socioeconomic background, parental modeling, media, psychological development, teacher/student interaction, and peer groups) as conditions that influence girls' perceptions of their futures.

The exploratory nature of my dissertation enabled me to examine the multiple experiences that girls have with people, institutions, and their culture and how these experiences affect the way they perceive their futures and the resources they need to attain their goals. By conducting in-depth focus groups and interviews in the homes and organizations where these girls live, I was further able to show how as gendered, classed, and raced subjects, the girls interacted with people, institutions, and culture differently and how this informed their perceptions about the future.

2.3 STUDY DESIGN

The design of this study—as well as the implementation and the dissemination of findings—were inspired by feminist ethical principles of research. Briefly, feminist research methods require researchers to pay specific attention to one's role as a researcher, power dynamics in the research relationship, how trust and rapport are established, factors that shape the research relationship including gender, race, social class, age, and the context of the research and how these factors influence data analysis and the ways participants are represented in the dissemination of research. My reflection on the ways these ethical principles played out in

creating and implementing the project are interwoven in the stages of the research described below.

Participants in this study were 13-14 year old girls and their mothers who live in Southwestern Pennsylvania and who I deemed to be poor and working class based on parental occupation and education levels. In their book, *Making Modern Lives: Subjectivity, Schooling and Social Change*, Julie MacLeod and Lyn Yates (2006: 34) ask, “In what ways can a study in one specific place, at one specific time, have something to say to those interested in young people’s futures?” While I chose these poor and working class girls as a “purposive” sample, my interest in these girls came from my own upbringing as a daughter of a grocery store clerk and warehouse worker who, with limited economic, social, and cultural resources, in many ways struggled through her own career path. My experiences and those of friends and family led me to be intrigued with the ways gender and social class are reproduced. I chose to study both white and African American girls because I wanted to see how poor and working class girls’ experiences differ by race. I chose girls from Southwestern Pennsylvania not only because they were conveniently living in the area in which I reside, but also because this region has a rich history of “blue collar workers” and a large population of working class families. Finally, I chose mothers, not fathers, because I was interested in how women influence girls and because research from the MVEC study conducted in 26 local school districts indicated that mothers are the primary source of career information for middle-school youth (MVEC Survey, 2003). The sample size (22 girls and 15 mothers) was determined both by convenience and by “reaching the point of saturation” or conducting enough interviews that responses became repetitive and no significant variations occurred (Demaris, 2001).

While the findings are limited in their generalizability, others may have an interest them because these girls do share a common sociohistorical position with other girls today (MacLeod and Yates, 2006). As with girls around the world, they have dreams and aspirations. How gender affects their everyday lives and futures is evident in recurring popular debates of “shortchanged girls” and boys being left behind, *Girl Power* and *Mean Girl*. The girls in this study, as well as girls globally, are inundated with negative portrayals of women in the media as well as consistent messages of individualism and personal responsibility. They are living in rapidly changing economic times, experiencing effects of global capitalism, and facing the feminization and racialization of poverty. The white girls possess racial privilege, although this privilege is muted by social class. The African American girls, like other girls of color nationally, are facing a “color-blind” racism that ignores the structural and cultural conditions that produce inequality and places responsibility on individuals for their plights in life (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

Initially, I intended to understand how girls from different backgrounds perceive their futures and the resources they have available to reach their goals by conducting observations, focus groups, and in-depth interviews with a small number of girls and mothers. Instead, I found that my intention for the design of the project was thwarted as I negotiated approval from the university’s Institutional Review Board, the organizations with whom I worked, and my own ethical standards as a feminist qualitative researcher. These issues, further discussed in Appendix A, had great influence over the final design of my study.

2.3.1 Final Study Design

The study is a cross-sectional analysis of how poor and working class adolescent girls from different racial backgrounds living in Southwestern Pennsylvania perceive their futures and the resources they have available to reach their goals. I worked with adolescent girls, ages 13-14 because at this age girls are maturing emotionally, physically, and socially, trying out new identities, and forming strong emotional relationships (Baker, 1986). That is, through their own experiences and relations with others, girls are beginning to understand who they are and who they think they can become. During adolescence, girls also “evaluat[e] educational and occupational possibilities” (Chavous, et. al., 2003) and make decisions about the courses they will take, which may lock them into a track or particular career path in the future, i.e., college preparatory, general studies, or vocational tracks. Adolescent girls and their mothers today are also negotiating changing gender roles as girls are increasingly encouraged to pursue careers and more mothers are in the paid labor force.

In a study that examines how girls from varying class and race backgrounds perceive their futures, it is important to understand the crucial role mothers play in shaping those perceptions. As stated, students in this area have consistently cited mothers as their primary sources of career information (MVEC, 2003). Moreover, girls’ development into and through adolescence is associated with their ability to think about how others think about and respond to them. Apter (1990) argues that girls develop their sense of self most often and most importantly through their relationships with mothers, not fathers or peers.

Finally, I included both white and African American girls and mothers in this study because I wanted to see how race “operates independently” and “intersects” when adolescent girls’ perceptions of the future are formed (Bettie, 2003: 35). Past research on girls that suggests

they suffer from issues such as declining self-esteem, self-mutilation, promiscuity, and/or a leveling-off of their aspirations (AAUW, 1992; Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Pipher, 1994) has focused on white middle class girls. More recently gender, social class, and race have been interrogated independently and simultaneously in Girls Studies. As Julie Bettie (2003: 37) suggests, gender reductionism, or assuming a common gendered experience, is “old news” in feminist studies and theory, but “little attention has been paid to cross-analysis of class.” I wanted to examine variations in the ways girls from different and the same racial backgrounds perceive and plan for the future, take up constructions of girlhood, react to their local environments, and how experiences of gender, social class, and race influence their perceptions of the future.

Michele Fine and colleagues (2003) suggest that the use of multiple data collection methods or “triangulation” creates a deeper understanding of research phenomenon than does using a single methodological approach. They state, “Different methods are likely to illuminate different versions of understandings” (187). In this study, I employed focus groups, individual interviews with girls and mothers, and an analysis of the content of cultural artifacts (a teen magazine) as different ways of unraveling answers to the same questions. In some ways, asking the same questions in different ways and getting the same answers increased the validity of my research allowing me to look for patterns in responses (Richardson, 2003), but in other ways, triangulating highlighted “different versions” of the girls’ experiences and aspirations, allowing me to recognize the fluid and contextual nature of girls’ subjectivities (Fine, et. al., 2003: 188).

2.4 DATA COLLECTION

Despite the challenges posed by the IRB, and having to negotiate hierarchies in community organizations, I was able to recruit a sufficient number of participants for this study. From May, 2006 through May, 2007 I gathered data by conducting three focus groups with a total of nine girls, 22 semi-structured individual interviews with girls, and 15 semi-structured interviews with the mothers of these girls. All of the girls who participated in focus groups also participated in an individual interview. The girls ranged in age from 13-14 at the time of recruitment. The girls and mothers lived in diverse neighborhoods in Southwestern Pennsylvania, with some of them living in predominantly African American neighborhoods, some in racially integrated neighborhoods, and others in predominantly white neighborhoods. I found difficulty labeling the girls as members of one category of class, which cannot be deemed by parental education or income, the neighborhoods in which they resided, or the schools they attended. Using parental occupation and marital status, whether girls were living in single or two parent homes and/or with dual earners, the schools they attended, the location and visible conditions of their homes, and the number and types of resources girls and mothers suggested they have, I further classified these girls as poor, working poor, and working class. This is not unproblematic because as Michael Zweig (2000) notes, being poor is not a static condition. Instead, “poverty is a condition that the working class is more likely to experience than the capitalist or middle classes and most of the poor do not stay poor for long periods. They cycle in and out of poverty, depending on employment, family situation, changes in earnings on the job...” (86). Since some of the participants and their families had more economic, social, and cultural capital than others, I use the categories of poor, working poor, and working class with caution, knowing that these families’ conditions fluctuate depending on a variety of economic,

social, and cultural conditions. Table 2.1 summarizes the racial demographics as reported by participants and class demographics as I determined.

Table 2-1: Interviewee Racial and Social Class Demographics

	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Mothers</i>
<i>Race</i>		
White	10	8
African American	11	7
Bi-Racial	1	0
<i>Total</i>	22	15
<i>Social Class</i>		
Poor	4	2
Working Poor	8	7
Working Class	10	6
<i>Total</i>	22	15

I recruited girls based on parents' education and occupation. I specifically excluded mothers and fathers with college degrees because I was interested in how parents would direct their daughters' education paths without having been to college themselves. However, during interviews with mothers who were referred to me in the snowball sample, I learned that two of them had college degrees.⁴ Table 2.2 summarizes the occupations of mothers who participated in interviews as well as fathers occupations, when available.⁵

⁴ After these incidences I specifically excluded girls who had a mother or a father with a college degree.

⁵ Fathers' occupations were unavailable because mothers were single-heads of families (N-7) or father's occupation was not discussed during interviews with mothers.

Table 2-2: Parent Occupations

<i>Mothers' Occupation</i>	<i>Fathers' Occupation</i>
Medical records clerk	NA
Homemaker	NA
Mail carrier	NA
Cosmetologist	Construction
Substitute teacher/waitress	Maintenance/construction
Teaching assistant	NA
Homemaker	Computer technician
Youth minister/bartender	Karaoke DJ
Hospital program administrator	NA
Administrative assistant	NA
Registered nurse	Unemployed/disability
Retail cashier	Janitor
Administrative assistant	NA
Food preparation and services	NA
Administrative assistant	NA

2.4.1 Participant Recruitment

Recruiting participants for this study was progressively difficult. I began the project with one site where I knew staff members and the Executive Director. A Place for Girls is an organization that serves African American girls ages 8-18, who live in Pittsburgh city

neighborhoods.⁶ The site was appropriate because staff run an afterschool program for 13-15 year old girls (the age group for which I was looking). Here, girls can brush up on basic reading and math skills, learn about health and wellness, life and leadership skills, and participate in various community recreation events. Prior to this study there was limited career education at A Place for Girls but an Education Coordinator has since been hired. I was given permission to do the study on the condition that I work with this staff member to help the organization better address the career development needs of the girls they serve. However, A Place for Girls only serves African American girls and I needed to identify a second site that served a more racially diverse population.

My first attempt in finding this site was to recruit from a local high school that served the population of girls I was looking for. I met with the middle school counselors and principals and they were excited about learning more about the needs of their students. However, while they were on board, the district school board denied my access. I then moved on to find an organization that served girls meeting my criteria and found it quite difficult. For example, one program served girls who were racially diverse, but included a higher income population and another also serving a racially diverse population, operated in a school—meaning I had to attempt to gain school board approval again which I did not want to do. I determined it was in my best interest to submit the IRB for A Place for Girls as one phase of the project and begin data collection with these girls and then continue to search for a second site that would meet my criteria.

After having the IRB review Phase One of my proposal twice, I was able to begin recruiting at A Place for Girls. This effort began in June, 2006. I began recruiting by attending

⁶ The name of the organization where I worked has been replaced with the pseudonym, “A Place for Girls” to protect the participants.

an awards dinner where girls and families were present. I was given five minutes at the dinner to introduce myself and my project. About one week after, I went on site to conduct a formal recruitment session where I met with about 20 girls during their regularly scheduled summer day camp, introduced myself and the study, and told the girls if they participated they would be given two \$5 McDonald's gift cards, one for the focus group and one for the interview. I waited four weeks and no forms were returned. Then I scheduled a meeting with A Place for Girls staff to determine why forms were not being returned. Staff suggested that girls were interested but it was often hard to get them to return any forms. They then suggested they would continue to remind girls to bring the forms back. By August, 2006, I had four girls bring the forms back and soon after conducted the first focus group and two individual interviews. I continued to try to recruit girls from A Place for Girls through a second recruitment session which was held during the girls' after school program. Two more girls responded but when I would arrive on site to conduct the interviews they and the initial girls were often absent. Over one month's time passed before I was able to conduct five individual interviews. I made one more effort at recruiting girls from A Place for Girls by attending a Christmas party for girls and their families. Here, staff assisted me in identifying girls in my age range and I was able to talk with girls and mothers face-to-face, with forms in hand, and asked them to participate. I was able to recruit four additional girl and mother pairs.

In the meantime I identified a second site, the Sarah Heinz House (SHH), which is an afterschool program that serves boys and girls ages 6-18. This site also runs a middle school aged girls' program where girls participate in recreational activities (gym and swimming), learn crafts, "healthy lifestyle choices," peer relations, attitude management, and basic manners (SHH website). The site was appropriate because they serve over 40 poor and working class white and

African American girls in my specified age range. Moreover, these girls are from poor and working class communities in and surrounding Pittsburgh.

My next step was to draft Phase Two of the IRB. Once turned in I waited one month for final approval. I conducted the first recruitment session at the SHH in early November. Here I talked with 40 girls in a classroom prior to the beginning of their Arts and Crafts night. I introduced myself and the project and answered a few questions from the girls. I waited one month and no forms were returned. In early December, I did a second recruitment session by meeting with the girls prior to their evening gym class. Here some of the girls recognized me and said they wanted to participate but forgot to return their forms. I waited until January, 2007 and no forms were returned. I then made several contacts (at least seven phone and emails) with SHH staff over the next month and a half asking if I could alter recruitment efforts, perhaps by attending a parent meeting. While over that period of time an SHH staff person told me two forms were returned, each time I tried to contact her to set up a meeting I did not get a response. By March, 2007 I determined, along with my advisor, that a snowball sampling method should be added to the project in order to increase the number of participants.

I drafted a third IRB proposal by modifying Phase Two to include a snowball sampling strategy, and received approval in about a month. As I waited for approval I began deriving a list of people I knew with girls in this age range. Once approved, I began contacting family and friends with girls this age (about five) and asking them to contact their family and friends to see if they wanted to participate. Usually a mutual friend would identify a mother/daughter pair, ask them if they would participate, and if willing, would give me their name and number to set up a time and place for the interview. What was different and more effective in the snowball sampling was that I was able to first explain the study to mothers and girls over the phone, all

were quite agreeable, and then once arriving at their home I could go over the consent process. For A Place for Girls and the SHH, I had to send consent packets home with the daughters without any initial contact with parents or the ability to explain the project face-to-face, which resulted in low response rates. Once I had the opportunity to recruit through a snowball sample, potential interviewees were identified weekly and the remaining 16 girls and 14 mothers were interviewed in less than two months.

What went wrong with recruiting from A Place for Girls and SHH? As discussed above, the IRB is quite stringent in their efforts to protect children involved in research and as a result requires rigorous recruitment and consent processes which influenced my response rate. While the low response rate could have been due to a forewarning I received from staff that parents are often “apathetic” and girls “irresponsible” I believe that the rigid IRB requirements played a major role in the low response rate.⁷

The difficulties I experienced recruiting taught me several valuable methodological lessons. First, I realized that flexibility in recruiting should be anticipated prior to the start of any qualitative study. Scheduling with organizations is difficult as programs run only during particular times of the year, staff leave organizations, and girls are not always present. Scheduling with parents is difficult when they are balancing work and family, children’s extracurricular activities, and are reluctant to have strange researchers come into their homes. It is important to build extra time into projects for unanticipated events. Another lesson that I learned was that in a project that requires rigorous consent forms, like one with youth, face-to-face recruitment is most successful. The opportunity to talk with potential participants directly

⁷ In addition, despite what I thought were clear directions most of the returned consent forms were incomplete, i.e., parents left out initials and signatures. I interpreted this as another indication that meticulous IRB requirements can impede accessibility to participants in that it is likely that parents may have been overwhelmed by the forms and chose not to have their children participate.

and explain the study prior to trying to ask for their permission enabled me to establish a connection with parents who I most often did not know. It allowed me to informally explain the purpose and motivations behind the project which attracted participants who wanted to help. Once I recruited individuals to participate and set up focus groups and interviews, I confronted new challenges in gathering data.

2.4.2 Focus Groups

I planned to use focus groups as a starting point, before individual interviews, as a way to explore broad questions about dreams and aspirations, ideas about success and failure, and to gain insight into the girls' resources and barriers. I had hoped that focus groups would enable me to refine the individual interview questions. However, difficulties finding girls to participate and scheduling the focus groups made it impossible for the focus groups to occur before individual interviews so both were conducted during the same time period. Nonetheless, focus groups proved to be an effective method for gaining insight into the everyday lives of girls, the girls concerns, and how girls interact in peer groups.

Focus groups are a useful method for feminists because they offer a "safe environment" so that participants feel more open to sharing their thoughts and ideas among peers like themselves (Madriz, 2003: 371). Having a small number of girls in each of my focus groups (three), was effective because in most cases, girls felt not only comfortable and accountable to contribute to the discussion, but their individual responses stimulated discussion and contributions from other participants. I found that the give and take nature of the focus groups led to spontaneous responses and triggered ideas for the others (Berg, 2001). Often incomplete answers were answered by other participants so I did not have to do a lot of probing.

Conversely, divergences in the conversation also led me to prompt for more in-depth discussions (Demaris, 2001).

Employing focus groups as a feminist methodology gives voice to girls and allows them some control over the structure and dynamics of the interview. Girls often announced “I have something to say!”, wanting their voices to be heard. In other ways, they exerted their own power and authority by talking over one another, changing the topic of conversation, asking to “skip” a question, and stopping paying attention. Feminist researchers also suggest that focus groups can be empowering in other ways. For example, Rose Demaris (2001) suggests that power is somewhat shared in a focus group where the researchers’ framing of a question is mitigated by the interaction between individual participants and the researcher. In my experience, participants questioned and challenged me and other participants. This dialogue can be empowering since, “participants gain access to new info, new ways of thinking, to the sense that they have the right to speak and the authority to act” (Goss and Leinbach, 1996). Indeed, both the girls and I introduced participants to new ideas about the education and career paths of specific occupations.

I found two significant advantages in using focus groups as a method, especially because in the first group, I was able to conduct the focus group prior to conducting individual interviews with girls. This group allowed me to reflect upon my (in)ability to interact with girls this age, calm my own fears about how participants would respond to me, and better understand ways of framing and asking questions to girls this age. The greatest advantage of using focus groups was that it allowed me to observe interactions between the girls, which was useful since the IRB did not permit me to conduct observations prior to interviews. These interactions provided insight to

which girls wished to be seen as leaders, who took leadership roles, how they handled conflict and disagreement, and which topics of conversation they were most comfortable speaking about.

I conducted a total of three focus groups. Two consisted of three African American girls being served by A Place for Girls and took place at the organization's site during a regularly scheduled program day. These lasted about one hour. The remaining focus group included three white girls who had participated in individual interviews and were a part of the snowball sample. This focus group was conducted at Panera Bread on a Friday afternoon and lasted about 45 minutes. During these groups, I asked general questions including definitions of success and failure, rich and poor, what a "good" or "bad" future might look like, their individual career aspirations and knowledge of those career pathways, and their perceptions of equality in reaching one's goals (see Appendix C-Interview and Focus Group Questionnaires). While I conducted only 3 groups, I found consensus across most questions. What was most interesting was the process and varying dynamics of the groups.

Kathryn Gold Hadley (2006), an ethnographer who studied Taiwanese children in an elementary school, discusses the various roles adult researchers can take in their studies and how these roles influence interview dynamics. Researcher's roles range from the "least adult role" where the researcher distances herself from other adults in the setting and engages in activity with children to a "semi-participatory role" where researchers participate when children invite them in (160-161). She suggests that gaining access is harder with older children because they have more power and ability to decide if/when to allow adults into their conversation. Even if marginalized or unwanted, adult researchers still have to "align themselves with young people" while "distancing themselves from an adult status" (161). During the two focus groups at A Place for Girls, I worked hard to find a role that was acceptable to the girls, the organization's

staff, and my own ethical standards. Given that the staff introduced me as “Miss Melissa”, I already had to negotiate an authoritarian role, but I found that in the focus groups, my role fluctuated between that of an authority and that of “the least adult”.

In creating focus group questions and carrying out the focus groups, I employed Bruce Berg’s (2001) guide for conducting focus groups which includes several steps to gain rapport and ensure participation. As Berg suggests, I used the introduction as the time to establish rapport with participants. For example, for the two focus groups at A Place for Girls, I brought along pizza, soda, chips, and cookies. I welcomed the girls to the treats as they came into the room. I then asked them questions about themselves, i.e., how old they were, which school they attended, how their day was, etc. Because the focus group with girls from the snowball sample occurred after I already interviewed the girls individually, I had established some relationship with them. Nonetheless, I still enticed them to participate by making the environment more relaxed; I bought them lunch and we sat at a table eating while we talked.

For all of the focus groups, I gave an introduction about the project, reiterated consent, privacy, and confidentiality issues, and discussed the basic rules and guidelines which included my intentions to “toss out a question” for their response. I stressed that responses may differ and that there were no right or wrong answers. I also told them the interviews would be tape recorded so that I did not have to take notes while we were talking and I gave them the option of not participating. One technique I used to gain rapport and to stress confidentiality was to allow the girls to assign themselves a fictitious name that I would use in the writing. Girls often found humor in this while at the same time were serious in coming up with one. Prior to beginning the focus group I tried to be relaxed, attentive, and humorous. I sat informally in a chair, offered them snacks, and joined in their conversations about school or their day by asking what

happened, who was there, etc. When I asked them to introduce themselves I also asked why they wanted to participate, and for the girls at A Place for Girls, said it was ok if they were doing it just for the McDonald's gift card.

Berg (2001) suggests that focus groups operate with short question and answer discussions, with the researcher using questions to guide the conversation but allowing the participants to move the group. He also suggests that the researcher can plan out intentional probing questions in case participants do not elaborate on their answers. As suggested by Berg, I developed a set of semi-structured questions that revolved around the major research questions of this project. I then created categories of questions with built-in flexibility for probing and deviation.

After examining the data from the three focus groups and seeing the variation in conversations among these, I saw that girls contributed to the direction in the conversation during the focus groups. In the first focus group in particular, girls veered off into conversations about making fun of other students at school and who was dating whom. In another focus group, one girl interrupted the conversation to ask if I watch *Flava of Love*, a reality TV show. The girls began discussing the characters in detail, i.e., what they were wearing, who they were "hooking up" with etc., so I interrupted by saying, "alright, I have a couple of other questions." On another occasion a girl drifted into a long story about a girl who had her period in school and the other students made fun of her because blood was on her pants and her chair. She said a boy was calling the girl "period juice" and "coochie blood" and laughing at her expense. I shifted the conversation by saying "Ok, I am going to switch the topic, ok?" because I saw no relevance in the conversation as it pertained to my questions. Still, I frequently found it difficult to balance the questions I wanted answered and the stories and experiences the girls shared that did not

pertain to my questions. In the same focus group, the girls began discussing an attractive male staff member and the crushes other girls had on him. Given my legal obligation to report any child abuse, I became concerned that if the girls would talk more about him, they might reveal something I did not want to hear. I quickly changed the topic of conversation as evident in the transcription and notes:

Remember, who used to work here?
Who? Mr. D. And so what? He's a
What's that one girl's name she was, she was crying all over him.
So what? Mr. D. is a grown ass man, look at y'all only like 14. Come on now.
He has a wife, even though you like him, whatever. A lot of girls was up on him.
Like feigning [yearning] for him. Like oh my god Mr. D's here. They be huggin
up on him everyday.
[So he's an older guy?]
Yeah. 24
He's 25 now.
Note: I quickly move away from this topic, not wanting to hear anything more
about it

Reflecting back on this conversation, I wonder if I should have listened further to see if the girls revealed any abuse or the man having a relationship with any of the girls. I had a past experience running therapeutic groups with girls this age in a group home, where I told girls what was said in the group would stay in the group and then a girl revealed sexual abuse from her uncle. I was obligated to report it and when I did, she was extremely angry with me, felt violated, and our trust was broken. In this focus group, I told girls what was said in the group would be kept "confidential" unless they revealed that harm was being done to them or someone they knew. But I think if they would have revealed some kind of abuse with this male staff member and I would have had to report it, I would have completely violated the girls. But my assumption that abuse was possible in the first place may speak to my own biases as a white, female, middle class researcher. Perhaps I began with an assumption that the girls were vulnerable because they are

African American, living in poor neighborhoods, and as staff told me, some having abusive familial issues. And perhaps I assumed this man would take advantage of them. I am still not sure whether or not my assumption was accurate and continue to wonder if I should have listened further to the girls.

The girls also exerted control over the conversation by testing my authority, as evident in the girl swearing in the quote above. Another time, I was trying to move the conversation along and I told a girl we could come back to her topic and she said, “No! Just real quick,” and proceeded talking. In all focus groups, girls frequently exercised agency by asking me to clarify questions, saying they preferred not to answer questions, and drifting in and out of paying attention to the conversation. They appeared comfortable in choosing what we would talk about and exerted power in directing the conversation.

Implying that the girls felt safe and influenced the direction of the interview does not mean that I did not have to work to gain their trust and rapport or that I had totally relinquished my power. In analyzing the focus groups, a recurring theme was what I labeled “me trying to be cool.” Trying to be cool included various ways I tried to relate to the girls. I did this best when we were discussing television and music. Lucky for me (but somewhat embarrassing), I was almost as knowledgeable about popular culture as them so I could contribute to their conversations. Another way I tried to be cool was to relate to them by sharing my own experiences. However, halfway through the data collection I felt the need to monitor how often I tried to align my experiences with theirs because I realized that girls usually do not want to be told stories about “when I was a kid.”

I also had to address issues of group dominance, silent members, and tensions between participants. As a facilitator using such a small number of participants, I tried to monitor who

was talking and how frequently, and solicit information from girls who were shy or less willing to talk. Still, each group seemed to have a dominant participant. However, I tried to make sure that I called on the more quiet girls to speak. I did this by directly asking the more shy girls to join in the conversation.

The most notable issue that came out of the focus groups was the variation in group dynamics. One group from A Place for Girls and the snowball sample ran similarly, with girls responding to the questions and the conversation moving smoothly. The other A Place for Girls focus group was very different. Prior to the group even starting, one of the African American girls told the other girls that her white teacher was admittedly racist. While it may not have been her intention, I felt as though she did this as a way to assess my response to her teacher's behavior. I think she wanted to see how I, as a white woman in a position of researcher authority, would react to the possibility of an adult being racist.

The focus groups were often hard to manage but I was prepared with questions and probing mechanisms, willing to share power in the group, and comfortable letting the girls take the conversation in various directions. As a result, I gathered rich information and insight into the daily lives of the individual girls, their collective view, and the ways they interact with their peers. I used focus groups as a starting point, as a way to test my own interactions with girls, and as a way to understand shared experiences among girls. Data gathered from the focus groups were supplemented with individual interviews, a method to which I now turn.

2.4.3 Individual Interviews with Girls

I have been given several opportunities to present preliminary findings from this study to policymakers, youth program providers, and students in research methods courses (discussed

further below in Dissemination of Findings). With each presentation, I am always asked about the validity of the girls' aspirations, given they are "so young" and will surely "change their minds." Sometimes, I wonder if these people will take my presentation less seriously, assuming that girls probably will not achieve (nor would they want to) the aspirations they shared with me. But what always eases the tension is reminding myself of the purpose of the interviews with girls. It is not the individual career aspiration with which I am most concerned. I am most interested in how the girls' daily living and experiences, their interactions with peers, families, and institutions, and the culture in which they live shapes their dreams and aspirations and influences who they think they can be, and how they think they can get there. Interviewing, as a method, provides a window into these thoughts. For example, according to Julie MacLeod and Lyn Yates (2006: 16) interviews "elicit conscious and self-conscious talk about what people are thinking, and what they want to say to researchers about their thoughts." Similarly, Earl Babbie (2004) suggests that in-depth interviews "permit a more detailed pursuit" of responses. Finally, Blee (2002: 15) suggests that individual interviews allow autonomy in how respondents talk about their lives; being able to tell their story as they see it reveals how interviewees make sense of the world. This is particularly the case in semi-structured interviews where the researcher begins with a "desire to understand rather than to explain" human behavior (Fontana and Frey, 2002: 75). In interviewing these girls, I tried to see the world from their point of view based on their past, current, and future potential experiences.

I conducted a total of 22 individual interviews with girls, nine of whom participated in a focus group. Eleven of the girls are African American, seven of these are participants in the A Place for Girls program and four were recruited in the snowball sample. Ten other girls are white and they were all recruited through a snowball sample. One girl is bi-racial. Interviews

with the girls from A Place for Girls took place in a conference room at the organization and I often brought chips, cookies, and drinks to share as we talked. Staff were not present but often walked through the room or peeked their heads in as we talked. The remaining interviews took place in the girls' homes. Usually we sat at the kitchen table or on the living room couch. Parents usually sat in an adjacent room and watched television or did household chores while we talked. Sometimes parents would walk through the room during the interview, which never seemed to interrupt our dialogue. In both the A Place for Girls and snowball interviews, I figured staff and parents may have been checking in on their girls' safety as I had not known most interviewees prior to this meeting.

Similar to the focus groups, I used an interview schedule, but asked questions in a flexible, semi-structured way to allow room for clarifying and probing. This enabled the participants to help shape the direction of the interview and allowed me to clarify or push for more descriptive answers. I asked numerous questions centered around themes about their everyday activities and concerns, perceptions of the future, parental messages about the future, resources they have to plan for the future, and their perceptions of equality in reaching one's goals. I used interviews as a way to gain a "more rich understanding" of girls' priorities, "their views of what the world might be like in the in the near future, their knowledge of possible lifestyles, and the preparations they are now making for the future" (Baker, 1986: 5-6) (See Appendix C-Interview and Focus Group Questionnaires). I created most of the questions from my own interests and the literature. However, I also added a specific interview strategy used by Maureen Baker (1986: 5) in her study *What Will Tomorrow Bring: A Study of the Aspirations of Adolescent Girls* called the "futures diary approach" in which I asked the girls to explain their

daily activities in their present lives, in two and five years, and then to explain a typical day at age 25 and 30 as a “fruitful way of helping them be more specific.”

I often began by trying to make some connection with the girls prior to the formal part of the interview. As with the focus groups, I would ask their age, what school they went to, or how their day was. I thought that I might have a difficult time getting girls to speak, but soon realized they were eager to talk with me. However, in one interview I did have a quiet and defensive participant. This particular interview was characterized by a lot of yes/no answers from the respondent and even a few “whatevers”. After the interview, this girl’s grandmother told me she was having a difficult time with her mother who often leaves her children alone or with the grandmother and as a result, she is very shy. Otherwise, girls were very responsive and eager to share. Sometimes this eagerness led me to question the sincerity of their responses. For example, when I asked one girl, “Who do you admire?” without hesitation she said, “You.” I thought this peculiar because it was the first time we met. When I followed up asking her why, she said, “because you are nice, respectful, and well-mannered.” Right away I told her I thought the same about her but as the interview proceeded and she kept talking about how she is frequently reprimanded by adults for having a smart mouth and being loud, I realized the more positive qualities she used to refer to me were probably qualities she was often told by adults that she should possess.

Of course I was cognizant of the various ways my own gender, race, social class, and age influenced the interview process with girls. I never assumed a shared gender made me an insider, especially since so many of the interviewees revealed negative connotations towards girls and women (discussed further in analysis chapters). When interviewing African American girls, I was highly cognizant of my own race and I tried to follow the methodological advice of

Charlotte Shoup-Olsen (1996: 106-107) who suggests that white researchers scrutinize their own biases throughout the research process including identifying one's "personal assumptions constructed by white privilege," and determining whether or not the researcher's assumptions are victimizing the research participants and affecting the interpretations of their responses. Perhaps while scrutinizing how I would act and respond to girls, I overlooked how they would act and respond to me. Maybe I felt too comfortable or that I would easily be accepted by the girls because I had past experience working with girls in a group home who were predominantly African American. Indeed, one of my first interviewees Amber, an African American girl, taught me a valuable lesson about racial dynamics in interviewing when she asked why I was doing this project:

[The reason that I wanted to do it, is because I'm doing, not just here at A Place for Girls, but I am working with girls all around.]

You said that already

[When I was little and I was growing up, I, my mom didn't have a lot of money. And she didn't have...]

WHAT?!?

[Huh uh (laugh) and my dad.]

That's a big surprise.

[And they didn't, and I wanted to do certain things, but they didn't know how to help me do it. Right?]

So are you trying to tell me that certain white people are poor?

[Yeah. (Laugh). You didn't know that?]

I mean like, there's like. There's this one white family that I saw on TV the kids don't go to school. The lady has 12 children. She has her 13th child by now.

Now she's about to have a 14th child. I don't think they can, I mean, big old bed. I was about to feel sorry.

Amber was surprised that white people like myself could come from poor backgrounds. She did not seem to know any poor white people and was only aware of poor whites from what she saw on television. While I came into the project aware that racial dynamics (and the ways they intersect with class, gender, and age) were important, this dialogue with Amber revealed that she

saw me as a white woman who did not face the kinds of financial problems her own family faced. Similarly, Charity, another African American girl said to me at the end of an interview “I just have one question, how often will you be seeing me?” Charity was being served by A Place for Girls and obviously other social service organizations and figured I was “one of them,” a service provider who would work with her and possibly help her deal with her problems. I felt a little disconcerted given this comment came at the end of the interview and wondered if she viewed me as an authority the entire time. If so, then perhaps she was also shaping her responses to what she thought I wanted to hear.

Interestingly, I didn’t feel the same kind of nervousness when working with white girls because I assumed my white race gave me “insider status.” This was often the case until I brought up questions that pertained directly to racial inequalities. White girls often looked at me in wonderment as to why I was asking them questions about racial discrimination and then quickly uttered statements about everyone having equal opportunity. I also felt reassured that a shared class background (some of the girls I interviewed were from my own home town) along with race and gender would enable me to relate to the white girls. This was not the case in Rachel’s interview as she was defensive, guarded, and offered very short responses. Other girls also said they were nervous during the interviews and often mothers asked “Did she do ok?” as if I was an authority or the interview was a way of testing their knowledge.

Demaris (2001) warns us of the limits of insider status by suggesting that “if being insider is taken up uncritically it brings with it a danger of essentialism, meaning the assumption that all those who are in a particular social category share a common experience or perspective.” I tried to limit how often I used my insider status to gain rapport and trust because if the girls didn’t share my opinion or experience I didn’t want them to feel bad or wrong. Furthermore,

even if we shared a race and class background, I was always an “outsider” when it came to age. As a result, I tried to limit how often I said things like, “when I was your age,” because the phrase is frequently used by other adults, it is authoritarian, and suggests the adult knows better. Interestingly, I found that highlighting an outsider status often worked well in gaining more description and clarity from the girls. For example, I did not always know what specific jargon meant and was sometimes unfamiliar with specific television shows the girls watched. By asking them to clarify, I could get a more detailed and rich response.

While the girls were sometimes nervous and needed to be reminded that I was not looking for a “correct” response, overall they were excited to participate in the interviews and eager to talk about their futures. They enjoyed being listened to, they thought deeply about their responses, and they never hesitated to ask me for clarification or to say, “I can’t answer that question, I don’t really know.” I thoroughly enjoyed interviewing these girls and learning about their daily lives, dreams, and aspirations. I rarely left an interview without giving the girls a name of a website, a program, or some information that could help them further explore their aspirations. I felt a deep sense of admiration and hope for each of the girls.

2.4.4 Individual Interviews with Mothers

As discussed above, interviews as a research method are an excellent way of eliciting individual’s articulations of their past experiences and their future hopes and aspirations. I conducted 15 individual interviews with mothers, seven African American and eight white. Twelve of the 15 mothers were drawn from the snowball sample and the other three were mothers of girls participating in the A Place for Girls program. All of the interviews took place in the mother’s homes. We usually sat at the kitchen table or on the living room couch. Often

children interrupted to ask mothers questions or tell on other siblings but since these mothers were so used to multi-tasking, these disruptions only minimally interrupted our dialogue.

Using an interview guide I asked mothers questions about their knowledge and feelings of their girls' aspirations, the messages they tell their daughters about working and careers, their own jobs and work histories, the resources they have and barriers they might anticipate in helping their daughters reach their goals, and their perceptions of equality. Questions were asked in a semi-structured manner in order to allow for clarification and probing (See Appendix C-Interview and Focus Group Questionnaires).

I approached interviews with mothers differently than girls because in most cases mothers and I were of a similar age. I couldn't use Reality TV to establish rapport so instead I found myself initially either asking mothers about their jobs or talking about the mutual person we knew who helped recruit them. Mothers were extremely inviting when I went into their homes, always offering me food or drink. They seemed relatively comfortable throughout the interviews, answering questions about their own work histories and current jobs in sometimes regretful and other times proud ways. As we progressed through the interviews and came upon questions that seemed a little uncomfortable for mothers (i.e., What did you want to be and what stopped you from getting there?), I found myself frequently referring to some of my family members' (and my own) unfortunate life experiences in attempt to establish rapport and trust. I felt like there were times that it was necessary to show some of the mothers that even though I was more educated than they, I had experienced a similar upbringing and continue to be close to family members that deal with some of the same social and economic stressors they do. In one particular interview a mother was discussing poor choices she made in her intimate relationships and I told her a bit about some of my own poor choices. I also talked about my family members

having unexpected pregnancies, children to different men and at young ages, and some of the trouble my younger cousins have had with the law. Retrospectively, I think I felt the need to do this more so among the African American women whom I worried would not open up to me because of my racial “outsider” status.

While there were brief times of awkwardness, most of the time the interviews were engaging and sincere. Mothers talked a lot about “mistakes” they made and that they hoped their daughters would not make. A few mothers were open about past problems with drugs and the law. Others talked a lot about different choices they wished they had made in their own careers and several suggested they still wanted to pursue new goals. All of them had hopes and aspirations that their daughters would achieve a higher standard of living than they did.

As with the daughters, I never left without giving a mother a piece of information such as a website or the name of a program in their neighborhood. I often exchanged emails with mothers and in one case took a mother’s email address so that she could give me information about a program for girls with which she was familiar so I could refer my little cousin.

Overall the interviews went very well with mothers. I found that sharing a similar upbringing in terms of class and gender helped create a comfortable environment for mothers. I think mothers were genuinely excited with getting a chance to talk with another adult. For example, when I was leaving an interview I told one mother that I hoped the interview was not too much trouble for her. She replied, “Are you kidding? It was great for me to get to talk and actually have someone listen to me!”

2.4.5 Reflections on Social Class and the Research Process

Sharing a common class origin with these girls intensified my empathy and passion for this research. Many times my personal connection made me feel sympathetic, wanting to help girls and mothers, especially when they talked about not knowing how to access resources that I know how to access. Being empathetic, not only could I appreciate girls' and mothers' experiences (i.e., girls' concerns with being popular and having nice clothes and mothers' struggles with coming up with the money to buy these clothes) but I was also able to create a better rapport by sharing my experiences which often made mothers feel empathetic toward me. I had a great deal of respect for mothers especially, and my ability to reveal reverence in interviews made for long conversations and a sharing of deep insight and meaning. But feeling overly empathetic was limiting because I often felt sorry for the participants. For example, when they said something I felt was racist I felt a mixture of anger and pity, thinking their limited experiences prevented them from "knowing any better". At times, I also wondered if the participants were able to detect that I had traveled across classes, and was afraid of being perceived as thinking I was better than others. I didn't want to dress too professionally. I didn't want to sound too smart. I didn't want to give anyone the indication that I knew something they didn't know. However, I tried not to assume that since I have crossed over to the middle class the people left behind needed to be saved or schooled. My education did not make me a novice in the everyday lives of all working class, poor, or disadvantaged people and I tried not to have preconceived notions about the "cultural values" of the participants.

My life was truly touched by the girls and women I interviewed. They welcomed me into their homes and shared intimate dreams and aspirations. On several occasions, I left the interviews in tears wondering how these dreams and aspirations could ever be reached when

parents and girls were barely managing the economic and social conditions that plagued their daily lives. On other occasions I left with a great sense of hope, knowing that a particular girl would reach her goals and parents would do “whatever it takes” to help her, as I was often told. At every interview, I saw myself and my own family and was reminded of the ways some of us were somehow able to defeat the economic and social challenges we faced and how so often, other family members were not.

2.4.6 Review of Popular Media

One final method I used to get to know the girls better and understand facets of their everyday life was to review of popular television. Media inundates the lives of these girls. Even when I was not asking questions specifically about television, girls brought up media figures and characters on shows they watch. They frequently discussed Reality Television shows that are played on *MTV*, *VH1*, and *Black Entertainment Television (BET)*. Because I also frequently watch these shows I was able to join in the conversation and ask them more specifically about the ways these shows influence their perceptions of the future. This was particularly useful because the IRB did not permit me to do initial observations with the girls.

During the focus groups and interviews, girls brought up a few of the same shows consistently. I decided to watch these shows more critically and think about the messages they give to girls about their future possibilities. For example, girls mentioned watching *The Hills (MTV)*, *Cribs (MTV)*, *Making Da Band (MTV)*, *Flava of Love (VH1)*, and *Keisha Cole (BET)* so I watched two episodes each of the shows. *The Hills* is a reality TV show about white upper-class suburban young people who live in Orange County, California. They live extremely extravagant lifestyles and each episode deals with teen relationships and friendships. The girls’

daily lives are made up of parties, shopping, and frequent arguments and fights with other girls. The boys are shown participating in sports, “playing” girls, and telling the girls how stupid and catty girls can be. All of the characters are white. *Cribs* is a program that showcases the homes of actors/actresses, singers, and athletes. When featuring female celebrities, they usually show closets full of clothes and shoes, miniature dogs, and other material things that make them feel like a “queen” or “princess”. When male celebrities “cribs” are showcased they are usually hanging out with a group of other male friends, and they frequently highlight their cars, sports facilities, and entertainment rooms, which are almost always equipped with pool tables, large screen televisions, and “stripper poles”. *Making Da Band* is a show created by P. Diddy (Sean Combs), a hip hop artist. It is a competitive singing and dancing show where five people are chosen to form a band and get the opportunity to launch a CD. This past season, the search was for an all female band. The show features girls “just like you” and transforms them into stars. Usually the show highlights characters from “the ghetto” that learn difficult lessons about hard work and determination. *Flava of Love* is a competitive dating show where women compete for the love of washed up hip/hop artist Flava Flav. Episodes usually highlight women fighting (often physically) over his affection, making fun of one another’s looks and fashion sense, and going as far as they need in order to sexually win over Flava Flav. The show features predominantly African American women in extremely stereotypical ways, highlighting them as overbearing, offensive, and promiscuous. *Keyisha Cole* is about a young Black female R&B singer’s daily experiences after she “made it big” and left her “ghetto” life. The show goes on the set of her video productions, features her interviewing on various radio stations, follows her to concerts, and throwing parties. She is often shown being assertive with her manager and co-

workers. Other episodes show her returning home, confronting her mother in jail, and hanging out with her ex-prostitute sister.

I also read *Teen Vogue*, a popular magazine for adolescent girls as a way to better understand current teen role models, fashion, and health and beauty trends. While the magazine is marketed to white, middle class girls and treats their lives and experiences as the norm, I chose *Teen Vogue* because it is featured on the Reality Television show *The Hills* (discussed above that many of the girls watch), when the main character Lauren Conrad lands her dream job with the magazine as a summer intern. Moreover, according to Brandweek Magazine (2006) *Teen Vogue* also markets to a slightly younger age group than other popular magazines like *CosmoGirl* and *Seventeen*, and readers are from a slightly lower income level.

I skimmed seven issues of *Teen Vogue* looking for both general messages and messages about careers and future aspirations. The magazine obviously targets white middle class girls as evident both in who they feature on the cover (in seven issues only one light-skinned African American girl was featured) and the fashion items they market (jeans costing \$300, purses for \$400, shoes for \$250, etc.) All of the issues cover three major areas including “Fashion,” “Beauty and Health,” and “Features.” The “Fashion” section predominates the magazine giving fashion tips on the latest styles and must haves. The “Beauty and Health” section covers taking care of one’s skin and hair and markets beauty products. The “Features” section tells the story of a celebrity on the cover, gives the monthly horoscopes, and illustrates emails from readers. Both the “Beauty and Health” and “Features” sections illustrate stories warning girls about their health and safety with titles such as, “Mean Girls and How to Deal With Them,” “Fakin It: Phony IDs, Real Trouble,” “Wild Things Out of Control on Spring Break,” “Gossip Girls, When Talk Goes Too Far,” “Sun Junkies: Girls Who Tan Too Much,” “Body Guard-11 Stay Safe Tips Every Girl

Needs to Know,” “The Hole Truth: The Hidden Dangers of Piercing,” and “The Sugar Habit, Why You Need to Kick It Now.”

The Reality Shows and the *Teen Vogue* issues provided insight into the ways celebrities, fashion, and beauty standards influence girls’ lives. Also illustrated in these media are ways girls are being scared into conforming to traditional norms of female behavior and how success and celebrity status can be achieved through invention or re-invention one’s self through hard work and determination. As will be discussed in later chapters, these media are likely to be influencing girls’ perceptions of their futures, who they think they can become, and how they think they will get there.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Kathy Charmaz (2007) Grounded Theory includes methods of data analyses that “consist of inductive, comparative, and interactive” approaches to inquiry. She suggests that grounded theorists simultaneously collect and analyze data throughout the research process. Through thorough, reflective, and repetitive analyses of data, researchers can be fair, call their preconceptions into question, and take a “critical stance toward data.” Drawing upon grounded theory methods I used InVivo, a coding software program, to analyze the data collected for this project. I coded both inductively and deductively looking for patterns that emerged in the data. Deductively, I coded based on themes that arose in my Master’s thesis, theoretical concepts from the literature (i.e., terms such as social and cultural capital), and themes that were derived from specific interview questions (i.e., barriers, resources). Inductively, I coded for newly emerging themes that had not been anticipated by my thesis, the literature, or interview questions (i.e.,

unsafe neighborhoods). Allowing myself to code for unanticipated themes helped to prevent against presumptions or biases in analyzing responses. In some cases I used a word count method, i.e., “move out of Pittsburgh” to quantify the number of girls giving a specific answer. From these codes, I frequently wrote memos which, according to Charmaz, “is a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the research process... and frees you to explore your ideas about your categories.”

I coded line-by-line, the interview and focus group transcriptions, notes taken after interviews and focus groups, and observations throughout the project that were recorded. I also coded for interview dynamics including power, agency, rapport, and comfort. This was helpful in analyzing the data because it allowed me to examine if and when interviewees may have contrived responses or when they felt uncomfortable with certain topics. It also enabled me to see when I was using my own experiences to relate to respondents which could potentially affect the way I interpreted their experiences. Coding took place throughout data collection and enabled me to frequently adjust my demeanor or the ways I asked questions during the interviews.

Once I coded for larger themes that emerged, I then took each tree node and further analyzed these data. For example, “barriers” was further broken down into “health barriers,” “family barriers,” “economic barriers,” “boys as barriers,” etc. This required a “careful line by line reading of the text” to look for newly emerging or neglected themes (Ryan and Bernard, 2003: 274). After identifying a set of dominant themes, I examined how these themes were linked together, i.e., how are “barriers” relating to “individualism”, how do “mother’s messages” link to “daughter’s aspirations,” etc. The overall goals of coding were to “identify the range and

salience of key items and concepts, discover the relationships among these items and concepts, and build and test models linking these concepts together” (Ryan and Bernard, 2003: 274).

2.6 DISSEMINATING RESEARCH

In the tradition of feminist qualitative research, I consider how I represent girls’ and mothers in sharing the findings from this project, “give back” to the organization where I worked, and use the information learned to effect policy change. Beyond having a contribution to academic theory, this project has numerous practical implications and I believe girls, parents, educators, youth program providers, and policymakers can benefit from hearing the voices of the girls and mothers I interviewed. I am fortunate to have a well-established base of networks in these arenas in the Pittsburgh area and have already had the opportunity to share preliminary findings. I plan to find other venues in which to present these data and I will continue to share findings as I further develop the analyses.

This project was partially funded by The Women and Girls Foundation of Southwestern Pennsylvania (WGF) and the University of Pittsburgh’s Women Studies Program. Aligned with feminist goals, the WGF grant encouraged recipients to use their projects to change organizational programming as well as the systems in which the project resides, i.e., the workforce development system. I have begun to respond to organizational needs in several ways. First, I presented preliminary findings to the staff at A Place for Girls to highlight what the girls and mothers are saying and to double check with the staff that the girls were properly

being represented.⁸ Based on the findings, I am also advising the A Place for Girls Education Coordinator on several projects, including developing a gender-specific career literacy program, providing her with local labor market information to use in the career exploration program, and linking her with other community programs and youth employment organizations. I have also presented data to the care managers at A Place for Girls and will be helping them strategize ways to respond to mothers' career information needs. Finally, as a result of this project and my writing a grant based on the findings, A Place for Girls was awarded a \$7000 grant from the Jewish Women's Foundation to create an equity-based career education curriculum that teaches girls about gender, race, and social class inequalities in the labor market and a career resource manual to provide mothers with resources to help better prepare their daughters for the future.

Systemically, I have presented preliminary findings to the Youth Policy Council (YPC) of the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board, a city/county board that sets policies and issues grants for youth employment programming. I will be meeting with the YPC again to make recommendations to be included in their requests for proposals for funding youth employment programs which I will base on findings from this study. In addition, I have met with the Mentoring Partnership of Southwest Pennsylvania, an umbrella organization for all mentoring programs in the region, and we are discussing the possibility of my presenting the findings to mentors in training. As a result of these efforts, I have been appointed to the steering committee for the Girls Coalition of Southwestern Pennsylvania.

I have also been asked to present findings from this study in two public venues. In April, 2008 I was a moderator for a panel presentation sponsored by APlus Schools, a local organization that advocates for improving student achievement in schools and opened the

⁸ Ideally I would have liked to review the findings with girls themselves to ensure proper representation but the IRB does not permit further contact with the girls after the interviews take place.

presentation with a summary of findings as they pertain to parents and schools. In November, 2008, I will be interviewed about this project on WellWoman Radio, a local radio station program concerned with the health and well-being of women and girls.

Having a well-established network of youth employment providers and career literacy educators will be useful as I seek additional venues in which to present these findings. Working with others who also work with girls and families similar to those in my study offers a way to get feedback on whether or not the girls I interviewed face the same experiences and challenges of the girls with whom they work.

2.7 CONCLUSIONS

I began this chapter by suggesting that youth researchers face particular and peculiar issues when they attempt to understand the daily lives of young people. I then illustrated these issues throughout the chapter by illuminating the various levels of “gatekeeping” I had to navigate in order to gain access to the girls, i.e., the IRB procedures, organizational requirements and scheduling, and parental consent. I showed how managing group dynamics in focus groups was no easy task and that researchers need to negotiate insider/outsider status while conducting individual interviews with girls. I suggested that age differences between myself and girls always rendered me an “outsider” and illustrated successful ways I found in negotiating the adult status. Conversely, I showed how age worked to my advantage interviewing mothers as well as a shared upbringing and familial circumstances which I could relate to their lives. Reflexivity is also discussed in the ways I analyzed the data. Finally, I shared ways in which I hope to make

this research matter in organizations, the local community, and most importantly, the lives of young girls.

Despite the seemingly ever present challenges, I sought to create a project that worked with participants on their own terms, studied the issues they face, and ultimately gives them a voice. I hope that the challenges I encountered do not steer other qualitative researchers away from their interests toward more positivistic, objective forms of research. I also hope that established qualitative researchers and mentors protect their Ph.D. students who have qualitative interests even if their projects may take longer to complete than quantitative work. I've been inspired by these challenges to make other academics aware of these potential burdens so that researchers do not have to heed the advice of mentors and colleagues and avoid research with young people.⁹ Young people need to be seen as creative, active social agents who not only want their voices to be heard, but deserve to be taken seriously.

⁹ A paper entitled, "NO KIDS ALLOWED! How IRB Ethics Undermine Qualitative Researchers from Achieving Socially Responsible Ethical Standards," has been presented at several conferences and accepted for publication in the journal *Race, Gender, and Class, Special Issue: Socializing Our Youth*.

3.0 WHO ARE THE GIRLS?

In this chapter, I examine the backgrounds of the girls who participated in this study, focusing on the cultural, familial, environmental, and financial factors that reveal who these girls are as well as the factors in their daily lives that shape their aspirations. My goal in this chapter is to explore what Amy MacLoed and Lyn Yates (2006: 38) term the “range of influences, practices, experiences, and relations” that poor and working class adolescent girls negotiate in their current lives and when perceiving their futures. These cultural, familial, environmental, and economic factors are simultaneously restrictive and supportive, disempowering and empowering. In the first section, I discuss how new cultural constructions of girlhood impact the girls’ images of femininity, self, and other women. I focus on the ways traditional and current notions of femininity, including *Girl Power* and *Mean Girl* rhetoric, position poor and working class white and African American girls much differently than middle class white girls. Specifically, I examine how the girls negotiate, take on, and resist cultural images of girlhood that position the middle class white girl as the norm. In the next section, I discuss the shared familial practices of these girls, focusing on the girls’ commitment and bonds to family, relationships with mothers, and homes. For poor and working class girls, family life poses constant contradictions not only for who they are at the moment, but for the futures they can envision. Interwoven in these sections is how peers and school shape girls’ sense of self.

3.1 CONTEMPORARY CONSTRUCTIONS OF GIRLHOOD

Alongside traditional images of femininity, two dominant discourses of girlhood have arisen in popular culture and media: *Girl Power* and, more recently, *Mean Girl*. While traditional images of femininity encourage girls to be cute, sweet, soft, and innocent and, at the same time attractive, thin, and sexually appealing to boys and men (Lamb and Brown, 2006), *Girl Power* and *Mean Girl* images promote new expectations for girls.

Girl Power constructs girls as “the new success story,” outdoing boys in academics (Sommers, 2000) and, as the beneficiaries of the successes of the feminist movement (Kindlon, 2005), receiving more public attention and opportunities to assert their independence. However, as Marnina Gonick (2006) suggests, *Girl Power* rhetoric gives girls access to feminist ideals of independence, empowerment, and self-actualization in a commercialized, perilous way. *Girl Power* rhetoric is dangerous because it focuses on girls’ consumerism and individual responsibility and suggests that problems can be solved individually through shopping, self-helping, and self-making (Goodkind, 2007). *Girl Power* images send traditional messages of empowerment to girls, but with a new bend. As Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mykel Brown (2006: 1-2) argue, the message of *Girl Power* is “being used to sell girls an image of being powerful... by conforming to a stereotyped image of an independent, ‘hott,’ boy obsessed, shopping teenager.” Further, they argue, “[m]arketers can channel girls’ desires along familiar conventional routes of beauty, romance, homemaking, nurturing, and shopping, all the while telling her how fun, imaginative, powerful, and creative she will be if she buys these products” (4).

In addition to the consumerism aspects of *Girl Power*, Anita Harris (2004) and Marnina Gonick (2006) show that there are specific economic and cultural explanations for the cultural obsession with *Girl Power*. Today’s economy and notions of citizenship rest in part, they claim,

on specific understandings of girlhood. Because the US economy is now based more on consumption than production, girls are expected not only to aspire to jobs in the rapidly growing service sector, but also to participate as consumers, playing their part in a global, capitalist economy. Too, rhetoric from the women's movement about independence and self-sufficiency, like neoliberal rhetoric from government and industry, position individuals as responsible and self-making citizens. *Girl Power* thus encourages girls to become independent citizens in the labor force. The highly successful "Alpha Girls," girls who are outdoing boys in education, possessing high levels of self-esteem, and attaining high level professional positions in the labor market, as described by Dan Kindlon (2006: 14), are an example of how media packages some girls as part of the first generation reaping the full "benefits of the women's movement."

Girl Power messages ignore the intricacies of girls' lives (Harris, 2004). The narrow definitions of success in these discourses of self-invention, self-sufficiency, and consumerism target white, middle class girls. They ignore class and racial differences that shape unequal opportunities and outcomes. Although girls of all class and race backgrounds are bombarded by these cultural discourses, for poor and working class girls, especially girls of color, *Girl Power* obscures the structural barriers they confront in the labor and consumer market (Gonick, 2006), the economic burdens that constrain their educational opportunities, the brutality of institutionalized racism, and the numerous social problems in their everyday lives.

A destructive outcome of the *Girl Power* movement is that of the "*Mean Girl*," also referred to as "Bad Girl," or "Violent Girl." This features girls who form cliques, gossip, and bully, have "gone wild," by drinking, partying and taking off their clothes for the pleasure of men, and acting out in physically and relationally aggressive ways.¹⁰ *Mean Girls* do what they

¹⁰ I will use Mean Girl to refer to all three of these.

want, get what they want, and fulfill themselves at the expense of others. Although the media glamorizes and condones *Mean Girls*, it always warns girls never to go too far in their assertiveness by featuring stories of the damage girls cause when they misbehave. In books such as *Girls Gone Mild: Young Women Reclaim Self-respect and Find It's Not Bad to Be Good* (Shalit, 2007), *Odd Girl Out* (Simmons, 2003) and *Queen Bees and Wannabes* (Wiseman, 2003) media show how girls harm themselves by acting out and inflicting cruelty on one another.

Mean Girl rhetoric portrays middle and poor/working class girls in very different ways. The middle class and white version of the *Mean Girl* is epitomized in two popular books *Queen Bees and Wannabes* by Rosalind Wiseman (2003) and *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* by Rachel Simmons (2003), both of which have entered the mainstream media, through the Oprah Winfrey show and her popular book list. *Queen Bees and Wannabes* inspired the film *Mean Girls*, and *Odd Girl Out* was made into a *Lifetime* television movie. In these books, middle class, white *Mean Girls* participate in what Simmons calls “relational aggression” by gossiping, forming cliques and leaving one girl out, publicly humiliating other girls, and spreading rumors about the sexuality of other girls. Middle class parents, teachers, and school administrators have become increasingly attuned to girl bullying as a social problem and try to thwart these behaviors through mother-daughter workshops and school-based bullying programs. For example, I recently attended a talk given by Rachel Simmons at a local private school where she spoke directly to white middle class mothers and daughters about the phenomenon of relational aggression.

Although *Mean Girl* stories universalize girls’ experiences, seeing *Mean Girls* as “becoming more like boys” or “an unfortunate by-product of girls and women seeking equality with men” (Chesney-Lind and Irwin, 2008: 12), when describing poor and working class girls,

especially those of color, *Mean Girl* rhetoric stresses more physical violence. Poor and working class white girls and girls of color are portrayed as both exerting verbal meanness toward their peers like middle class white girls, and also as potentially physically violent.

3.1.1 Media Images of Girlhood

Media perpetuate the *Girl Power*/*Mean Girl* discourses along with those of traditional femininity. Television, in particular, plays a key role in socializing girls into seeing themselves through the lens of *Girl Power*, *Mean Girl*, or traditional women. Through television, the girls are inundated with messages that teach them to see themselves and other girls in conflicted ways, as feminine and submissive, strong and tough, and sexual and virginal, all at the same time.

The girls in my study reported watching a lot of television. In particular, they watched Reality Television shows on *MTV* and *VH1*, dramas like *House* (a hospital-based drama) and *CSI* (a criminal investigation drama), and family oriented shows on the *Disney Channel* and *UPN*. However, the shows they watched most often were *I Love New York* (VH1), *Flava of Love* (VH1), *Making the Band* (MTV) and *The Hills* (MTV), all of which send conventional messages of classed and racialized femininity. *I Love New York* and *Flava of Love* are competitive dating shows that feature predominantly African American women and normalize girls “catfighting”, competing for a man, and referring to each other as “Ho’s” and “fake.” *Making the Band* is a competitive singing/dancing show that features both white and African American girls and in which references to girls’ physical bodies and beauty are not just abundant but are equated with success. For example, in one episode, Sean “P-Diddy” Combs tells one girl she is “about a hamburger away from losing the competition,” suggesting that this attractive and physically fit teen can have everything taken away from her if she doesn’t monitor her eating habits.

Moreover, the show targets participants from rough and impoverished neighborhoods, who often argue, are verbally aggressive, and sometimes physically fight, teaching that they will not make it to the top if they act like they are from the ghetto. Viewers may believe this message when the successful producer, Sean “P-Diddy” Combs, reminds the participants frequently that he too comes from “the hood.” *The Hills*, a reality show, is about wealthy girls growing up in Orange County, California. These girls epitomize the consumption aspect of *Girl Power* as they spend their time shopping, going out to eat, and hanging out in night clubs. The show focuses mainly on frequent disputes between girls over boys as the boys comment on their “cattiness” and the “drama” girls bring upon themselves.

Three themes of girlhood emerge from these shows. First, following traditional images of girlhood, girls’ bodies and behaviors are under constant scrutiny, monitored, and often controlled by men. Second, these shows display *Girl Power*. On the *Hills*, girls’ shop, go out to eat with their friends, and work in glamorous jobs as party planners and fashion stylists. On *Making the Band* (and other competitive shows that feature poor and working class white and African American girls) *Girl Power* can be found in the winner of the contest. That is, the girl/s who win the competition are shown as achieving against the odds of their upbringing, suggesting that hard work and motivation can catapult someone out of poverty and immunize them from sexism, racism, and classism. Third, these shows also display messages of *Mean Girls*. While girls of all classes and races are shown as catty and dramatic, *I Love New York*, *Flava of Love*, and *Making Da Band*, where participants are predominantly African American and/or poor and working class, show disputes that are aggressive and physical, with girls mouthing off, and men controlling these women and teaching them proper ways to behave. In contrast, on *The Hills*, where all of the characters are white and wealthy, fighting is shown in the forms of gossip and

relational aggression, and problems between girls are often resolved by men who tell them to stop acting like girls and to just get over their differences.

In their study *Beyond Bad Girls: Gender, Violence and Hype*, Meda Chesney-Lind and Katherine Irwin (2008) found that cultural representations of girls and girlhood are taken up by girls in their self-perceptions. For example, they found that girls borrow from popular discourse when describing themselves and their friendships and use recent “terminology and symbols to frame and interpret their past emotional lives” (Chesney-Lind and Irwin, 2008: 45). But the terminology and symbols from which they borrow are often negative, creating they claim, “a new twist on a very old and damaging construction of women” (Chesney-Lind and Irwin, 2008: 21). For example, the girls in their study criticized other girls as mean and nasty and said they preferred the company of boys. Such negative sentiments about girls are not surprising, they argue, given that the *Mean Girl* construction of girlhood is “just one more mainstream message about how ‘bad’ women and girls are” (45). By ostracizing other girls, Chesney-Lind and Irwin conclude that girls buy into negative dominant discourses about girls so that they can excuse themselves from these negative discourses.

In her study of women’s television viewing habits, Andrea Press (1990) found that working class women are more likely than middle class women to take television viewing literally, with limited irony or critique in their discussions of the shows they watch. Perhaps as a result, working class children also are less likely than middle class children to learn to view the media critically. Indeed, Ron Warren (2005) found that when low-income parents monitor children’s television viewing, they use authoritative strategies such as prohibiting children from watching specific television shows or having them leave the room when shows are too risqué, rather than instructive mediation, such as having dialogue about the content of the show which is

more commonly used by middle class parents. This is not to say that poor and working class girls are not or cannot learn to be critical readers of culture. However, if their television viewing is not monitored or their parents are not teaching them to view the media critically, they may be “more vulnerable and likely to accept and reproduce [the messages they receive by the media] in their daily behavior, feelings, and thinking” (Lamb and Brown, 2006: 57). It is unclear if the media is a reflection of girls’ ideas and behaviors or if the girls in this study appropriated images of poor and working class women that they directly viewed on television. Regardless, the girls reflected popular images of traditional femininity, *Girl Power*, and *Mean Girl*.

When I asked the girls to describe themselves and other women, I found their responses congruent with aspects of each, traditional femininity, *Girl Power*, and *Mean Girl* rhetoric. They often intertwined this rhetoric, resulting in contradictory self-images. In some ways, girls described themselves compatibly with traditional notions of femininity when they said they were “kind,” “a good friend,” and “considerate.” In other ways, girls’ responses mirrored those of *Girl Power* rhetoric as they generally articulated positive self-images using words like “outgoing,” “smart,” and “funny” to describe themselves. Kira illustrated both traditional notions of femininity and *Girl Power* rhetoric when she described herself as “energetic, kind, loving, and respectful.” Other girls prided themselves on being “a good friend” and listening to others when they had “problems,” which they highly valued because they appreciated being listened to themselves. At the same time, however, these same girls gave self-descriptions that were less positive and reflected images of the *Mean Girl*. Many articulated instances of ill-temperedness, times when their “smart mouths” got them in trouble, and a strong sense of not caring what other people thought about them. In two different interviews, Elaina and Keisha explained their “meanness” as follows. Elaina said, “I don’t know. I get mean a lot. Like, I’ll

admit that. Like, I freak out on people for no reason. I don't know why, but it just kind of happens. But otherwise, I'm nice and I like to help people. But I'm just mean." Keisha too, identified her meanness. She said,

I am bright.

[Bright as in smart? Or bright as in happy and cheerful?]

Yeah. And happy and cheerful.

[Ok. Both of those?]

Yeah. Sometimes evil.

[How?]

Cause my mood changes sometimes. I'll be nice and then one thing will mess everything up and I'll just go mean for the rest of the day.

The girls' illustrations of traditional notions of femininity, *Girl Power*, and *Mean Girl* rhetoric suggested that they were conflicted about who they wanted and were supposed to be. While it is perhaps normal developmentally for girls of this age to describe themselves with opposing traits and emotions. Moreover, as Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2008: 8) contend, for generations girls have been told to "be nice and kind" which has not only "limited their ability to compete in masculine worlds," but also encouraged them to take their powerlessness out on other girls. At the same time, they describe themselves and their behaviors using new images of *Mean Girls*, *Bad Girls*, and *Violent Girls*.

The girls told me several stories of having to defend how they look, dress, and act in peer groups and about not getting along with other girls. For example, in a focus group they talked about how boys publicly made fun of girls for how they look and how other girls joined in the amusement. In an interview Kassidy told me that "not a lot of girls are too fond" of her, because she was attractive and dated older boys. However, girls also made it a point to tell me they didn't care what other people thought of them. As Kassidy said, "You can give me as many dirty looks as you want, but it doesn't bother me. It used to bother me a lot, but like since ninth grade

I kinda like just gave up on it.” Danielle also explained the contradictory feelings girls have about being the subjects of peer scrutiny:

It’s like I wish I look good because it’s intimidating, going to school sometimes, because there are those people that just look better than you and people like them better and stuff. So yeah, it’s definitely a challenge to go around and have to deal with the stuff now. You know, you do want to look good. You want people to like you. You want to maybe date people just to make you feel happy, content, like full. [Yeah. Do you feel that way, cause the last time we talked you said you didn’t really?]

I really still don’t care about people at school mostly, like they don’t really matter to me. I have the people that I care about and they don’t go to my school, so I’m not really worried about it.

Danielle was clearly conflicted as she said she only cared about people close to her, but then said she found it challenging to deal with the ways other students equate looking good with popularity and worth.

These girls also describe other girls as mean. In the focus groups, the girls often talked negatively about other girls, indicating they cause “drama” or trouble because they fight over boys and suggesting that they take sides with boys when girls are causing “drama.” Star explained how girls made fun of other girls when they do not respond to the demands of boys:

This one girl got dumped by her boyfriend...Oh my god it was so hilarious. He embarrassed her in the cafeteria, he really embarrassed her. There was like a whole bunch of people, so he was like, ‘you gonna come sit with me at lunch’. So she just kept ignoring him and trying to show off for her little friends. So we went over and asked her, ‘How come you ain’t sitting with him,’ and she was like, ‘Cause I don’t want to,’ and I was like, ‘how would you feel if he came over and said he don’t want to go with you no more’. She was like, ‘I’d be so upset’. I said, ‘you should go over and sit with him’. So she was like, ‘I’ll go over and sit with him.’ So as she went to go sit down, he kept moving away from her. Like something was wrong. I could not get what they was talking about. So he start talking bad to her. Like, ‘Oh you stink. You look like a ho’. He just started going off on her. Like starts talking bad to her. Starts giving her bars [dissin’ her] was like, ‘You look like a fucking like a fucking grinch off of Pinocchio or something’. He just went off on her. I was like, ‘oh my god’. It was like so funny.

[So he broke up with her?]

Yeah he broke up with her. Because he don’t want to go out anymore.

[Another respondent: Was she hit? [ugly]]
Yeah she was ugly.

The girls don't want to be made fun of but indicated they don't care if other people like them. Then they participated in the embarrassment of other girls as they competed for popularity and attention from boys.

Perhaps the girls' sexuality and perceived sexual attractiveness, learned in part, through the media, explains some of the reasoning behind the peer competition between girls. As Barrie Thorne (1993) found, "the construction of young girls as objects of male sexual desire" means that girls' popularity is tied to appearance while boys achieve status in the realms of athleticism and adherence to traditional standards of masculinity, i.e., being tough, cool, and sexually explorative (cited in Chesney-Lind and Irwin, 2008: 140). Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mykel Brown (2006: 6-7) also comment that television teaches girls to "invest in a lifestyle that imitates and works towards getting attention and power through looking good and attracting boys." Moreover, the sexuality of young white middle class women and young poor white and African American women has been portrayed very differently in popular culture and on television. For example, for white middle class girls sexy is seen as passive, submissive, and virginal. Yet for poor and working class white and African American girls, sexiness is portrayed as including promiscuity, aggressive sexuality, and as shown in the Reality Television shows mentioned above, physically fighting for their man.

Such behaviors may be directly attributed to their internalization of what girls see on television. That is, girls may compete with other girls because they watch so many Reality Television shows where girls are in direct competition with one another to win the approval of a man and even win the man himself. In shows that feature poor and working class white and African American women, this competition is fierce and the baddest, bitchiest, meanest girl gets

the most airtime and becomes the most popular girl on the show, all the while being ostracized and ridiculed for her behavior. As television highly influences contemporary constructions of girlhood, these stereotypes also play out in the girls' everyday lives and interactions.

In addition to the influences of media, peers also influence girls to be concerned about popularity and reinforce sexual double standards. As a result, these girls have low opinions of other girls, prefer the company of boys, and ostracize girls who are overtly sexual. In sum, they hold attitudes "that condemn femininity and celebrate masculinity" (Chesney-Lind and Irwin, 2008: 76). They are conflicted between not caring at all what others think about them and wanting to be attractive and sexually desirable, so much that they would go to the extreme of making fun of other girls to be popular.

The girls' displays of sexuality also were reinforced by adult men in schools. As Kasey told me, some male teachers treat girls better if they are pretty and one even gave her special attention in helping her complete her class requirements. Even though she knew this was biased behavior from the male teacher, she shrugged it off by saying, "you can't prevent it unless you fire all teachers." Similarly, in a focus group, Keyanna, an African American girl, launched into a long speech about how a woman's sexual attractiveness will give her an edge in the job market. She said, "Everybody knows if you are good looking you are going to get the job...why would he [a male boss] wanna sit around and look at you all day if you are not cute?"

3.1.2 Monitoring and Controlling Girls

Contemporary girlhood is constructed under regulation, monitoring, and surveillance. As Anita Harris (2004) suggests, the successes of the *Can-do* girl is measured by her independence, purchasing power, and career as well as by her adherence to traditional norms of femininity as

wife and mother. In contrast, the *At-risk* girl is subject to surveillance through schools, juvenile detention centers, social programs, and the welfare system.

Ebony, an African American girl, reflected on her feelings about being under surveillance in school,

We don't have recess.

[No, not a free period to do your homework and stuff?]

Don't got a free period...Only time you do that is at lunch.

[Really?]

We have a courtyard. It's like a jail...A jail courtyard. Ok, come on now (rolling her eyes).

[Why is it like a jail?]

I don't know. How they built it. They must have did it for the kids that's bad or something.

[Is it, it's fenced in? Does it feel like a jail?]

Yeah, because they close the gate on us...there's nothing to do but play in the courtyard with other people.

By using the term “we,” Ebony suggested that her school peers are frustrated by close monitoring and surveillance and revealed the ways in which poor and working class students are controlled by schools.

Edward Morris (2005: 35) studied the regulation of poor and working class students in schools in “Tuck in That Shirt!” Race, Class, Gender, and Discipline in an Urban School.” He suggests that urban schools regulate girls’ bodies differently than boys’ by monitoring their style of dress and demeanor. Among girls, educators were particularly concerned with “ladylike” behavior and dress, especially for African American girls and tended to focus on enhancing the social skills of African American girls. African American girls who asserted themselves were deemed “masculine and threatening” and were punished for being too loud or outspoken. Moreover, because adults within the school interpreted girls’ dress and demeanor as inadequate and oppositional, some students came to see themselves this way.

Similar to Morris' students, the girls in my study illustrated the ways in which the girls came to see themselves and other girls as physically aggressive and mean. Katrina, an African American girl, told me that she was suspended five times last year for fighting in school and "switched out" of her courses for fighting. She also predicted she would be "on house arrest" when she is sixteen. Similarly, Star, a bi-racial girl told me that she would fight any girl over her boyfriend if necessary. Girl fighting was not out of the ordinary for these girls, as Brittany, an African American girl, told me that it is not uncommon to witness fights in school. She said, "There was a fight in my school everyday for the past two weeks." Fighting was not a part of only African American girls' lives. Cassidy, a white girl, suggested girls are not exempt from this aggressive behavior, "Girls are like ridiculous now. It's all there is. There's never boy fights. There's always girl fights in school." While both African American and white girls talked about girl-fighting, African American girls were more likely to personalize fighting and say that they have participated in fights. White girls only talked of threatening to fight or witnessing fights.

Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2007: 28) also offer a compelling explanation for the racial differences in the ways girls in this study talked about girl-fighting by suggesting that the media has "hyped" up the extent of girls' violence while arrest data, self-report studies, and victimization studies of youth violence do not "corroborate that girls are closing the gender gap in violence." They argue that the media-driven portrayal of girl violence has fostered and justified an "increased formal control of girlhood" (31) which has been particularly harmful for African American girls, "who are being punished for minor forms of violence that in previous years would have been ignored" (155). As more public attention is being paid to the perceived violence of girls and their behaviors are increasingly monitored, they began to adopt Mean and

Violent girl discourses. Because poor white and African American girls are disproportionately featured as violent, this media induced “self-fulfilling prophecy” fosters an increase in the regulation of their behaviors (Chesney-Lind and Irwin, 2008: 155). The more girls are pathologized and concurrently policed, the more they take on definitions of themselves as violent.

Not only are poor and working class girls’ verbal and physical behavior increasingly being monitored, but so are their sexual behaviors. Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2008) suggest that parents adopt media standards of sexual desire by pushing their girls to be pretty and innocent and simultaneously attractive and sexy, and by doing so, reinforce not only sexual double standards, but also the sex/gender system in girls’ everyday experiences. Moreover, social class plays into these standards in that higher class parents tend to be less rigid in sex distinctions and lower class families are more concerned with monitoring girls’ sexual behaviors (Chesney-Lind and Irwin, 2008). That is, middle class parents are more likely to monitor girls and boys sexual behaviors in similar ways, whereas poor and working class parents police their daughters’ sexual behaviors more than their sons’ as historically sexual exploration by boys has been encouraged while that of girls has been closely monitored.

Mothers in this study were preoccupied with their daughters’ relationships with boys, especially as they pertained to their futures. That both white and African American mothers were equally concerned, if not obsessed with monitoring their daughters’ relationships with boys is an important finding, given that the literature on mother/daughter relationships often distinguishes between the parenting styles of white and African American mothers. Shakira, an African American mother told me, “A young man could always [be a barrier]. You know, I’m like, don’t let him throw your thoughts off, your sights off. Don’t— I did.” Amy, a white mother

agreed when asked if she foresaw potential barriers to her daughter's success. She replied, "uh men... boys and men. If she gets, you know, too caught up in one of them it could mess things up I am sure. You know like say she is real involved and she wants to go away to college and he wants her to stay here....," she explained that a boy's influence could stop her.

Many mothers also were concerned that their daughters would have sex or become pregnant and as a result, monitored their interactions with boys closely. Linda described a conversation between herself and her daughter who wanted to go to the movies with a boy four years older than her.

I said, '*No* absolutely not.' You know so she hates me right now. 'Oh mom, come on, he just looks at me as a friend.' 'Oh no he doesn't honey, he wants to get in your pants. And if you can't realize that then I am going to have to be the one to show you.' I said, 'Cause we could always talk to your dad about it. He would *flip!*'

For many mothers in this study, protecting their daughters resulted from the experience of having teenage pregnancies themselves, or having older daughters with unexpected teen pregnancies. Beth talked about the negative influence of boys who are, she believed, the "biggest persuasion into getting girls to drink and take drugs." She monitored her daughter's behaviors by listening in on her telephone conversations. She argued, "There's no such thing as privacy. I tell them that too. When they say, 'You're invading my privacy,' I say, 'You don't have privacy. I can walk in your room. Go through your drawers.' And I do. 'You are a minor. You have no privacy.'"

Julie also protected her daughter by staying with her as much as possible. She worried about "guys doing anything [to her daughter]" so she said, "I like her right here by my side...and I like it that way because I know where she's at, I know what she's doing, and I'm there to protect her."

This is why Julie did not want her daughter to "go away" to college because "If she is here, I know what she is doing." These mothers adhered to traditional notions of female sexuality, as

they suggested their daughters needed to be protected from the barriers they envision can be caused by early sexual relations with boys.

Kira also said she talked very frankly with her two daughters about sex with boys to try to sway them from repeating the same mistakes she made. She said, “I had my first daughter when I was 17 and I don’t want them to be making the, I don’t think it was a *mistake* but I just shouldn’t have did it at that particular time. I don’t *regret* it or anything like that, but I don’t think you wanna be no teenage mom like me.” Similarly, Cheri shared her regrets about having an early-aged pregnancy by stressing to her daughter to keep her virginity. She said,

She’s looking at her body and she sees boys looking at her body. I talk to her about sex, pregnancies, and we call it the ‘v-card.’ So we say you got to keep your ‘v-card.’ You know, if you give your v-card up everything is just all over. You know, boys want one thing, so I feel good she still has her v-card you know. But she knows that I had her sister at a very young age.

Perhaps these mothers adhered to conventional understanding of female sexuality, i.e., that women are vulnerable and that having sex can ruin their futures, because they have firsthand experience with early and unwanted pregnancies that they saw as having prevented them from reaching their own goals.

Mothers also feared that their daughters would be sexually victimized by boys and men and thus “regulated” their daughters’ sexuality (Chesney-Lind and Irwin, 2008: 76). Several said they worried that their daughters would be raped. Beth caught me off guard when her first thought was a potential rape after I asked her if her daughter might run into barriers in reaching her goals. She replied matter-of-factly, “Depends on what it was. Like if something traumatic, like she got raped, that oh, I don’t even know how I’d react. I guess I’d have to kill the rapist.” Anita replied similarly to the same question. She said, “I have a great fear of her being raped. I

really do,” and explained that she kept track of the time it took her daughter to be transported home from her after school program by a male van driver.

The girls internalized their mothers’ fears and concerns that boys could prevent them from reaching their goals. They consistently repeated their mothers’ messages that boys were a distraction and, as Danielle said, “they just seem to hassle me, confuse me, sidetrack me.” All the girls knew that unexpected pregnancy could prevent their future success because they had older sisters, cousins, and friends who had gotten pregnant. However, their race seemed to matter when they discussed the consequences of an unexpected pregnancy. Several white girls recognized a potential pregnancy as a barrier but believed it wouldn’t happen to them. As Amanda asserted, “I am not going to get pregnant,” and Kasey said, “That would never happen to me, ever. I can tell you now.” The African American girls however, also recognized pregnancy as a barrier but never said it wouldn’t happen to them. Moreover, when they talked about boys as a distraction, they also talked about experiences where boys have impeded girls’ success by being manipulative or abusive. One African American girl said she and her friends worried about peer pressure from boys to have sex and two others described girls they knew whose educational goals were thwarted because boys convinced them to put their education aside to be with them.

3.1.3 The Implications of *Girl Power* and *Mean Girl* Rhetoric

Girl Power and *Mean Girl* rhetoric appear to send messages of empowerment to girls universally, but they ignore the complexities of girls’ lives. The girls in this study heard and undertook the messages of *Girl Power* by describing themselves as hard working, driven, and able to overcome or prevent barriers that may come their way. They also took on messages of

the *Mean Girl*, suggesting being mean was an assertion of their independence, yet describing in detailed ways how they verbally ostracized and physically fought with other girls. From these discourses, they were learning ways to perceive themselves, femininity, sexuality, and other women in classed and racialized ways. They were caught in a contradiction of *Girl Power* and *Mean Girl* discourses, which served to mask and skew their ability to critically evaluate the racial, class, and gender barriers in the education and labor market systems they encountered. Moreover, how *Girl Power* and *Mean Girl* rhetoric plays out in the girls' everyday lives also indicates that the effect of these messages is increased monitoring and surveillance of their behaviors and interactions with peers and boys. This is especially the case for poor and working class girls who are also viewed as causing their own problems, inflicting violence on others, and in need of protection from promiscuous relationships with boys.

3.2 HOME AND FAMILY LIFE

While the larger cultural discourses on girlhood explain how understandings of poor and working class girls are produced, examining their home and family lives reveal more about the girls and the factors that shape their aspirations. In this section, I highlight poor and working class life described by the girls as they discussed how they spent their time, with whom they spent time, and what they did on a daily basis. I suggest that their daily actions and interactions revolved around their deep emotional connections to their families, especially their mothers. In these actions and interactions, they felt conflicted between being responsive to the needs of their families and being self-orientated and directed. It was also through these close interactions that the girls learned that their families face economic constraints that can interfere with their future

education. Finally, I show how living in tight spaces in communities and homes conflicted with their desires for independence and emotional growth. The goal of this section is to show the contradictions posed by home and family life that contributed to how the girls see themselves.

3.2.1 A Typical Day

According to Annette Lareau (2003: 35), “[s]ocial class differences in children’s life experiences can be seen in the details of life.” Comparing the child-rearing practices of white and African American middle and working class parents, Lareau saw a clear distinction in the ways families organized their daily life. She found that middle class families lived at a fast pace with overbooked schedules of organized activities centered on the children, and had economic resources available that structured and organized children’s activities, determined family life, and governed how families spent their time. Children’s activities and behaviors were closely directed by adults and children spent much of their time in the company of adults. Conversely, economic burdens impacted the everyday lives of working class families, who were less likely to participate in organized and scheduled children’s activities and less concertedly structured children’s time. Instead, working class families spent much of their time with relatives where children played freely with siblings and cousins. In addition, working class parents openly discussed money problems in front of children, and spent “enormous labor to get family members through the day.” The working class children in her study also had fewer opportunities than their middle class counterparts to develop their interests in organized activities, more hours of free and unstructured time, and less supervision from adults. While both middle and working class children learned valuable life skills from how their daily lives were organized, Lareau suggests that the routines of daily life in working class families are not equally legitimized in a

society where middle class values and practices dominate. Middle class parenting actively fosters children's talents, skills, and abilities, while working class parenting focuses more directly on safety and security.

My findings mirror much of what Lareau found in the daily organization of working class families. Even though many of the girls in this study participated in extracurricular and after school activities their lives also included extensive familial ties and responsibilities. Most of their days were spent following a routine that included school, family, friends, and television. What was common among these girls, but perhaps different than their middle class counterparts, was how the physical spaces in which they lived, their deep emotional ties to their families, and their sense of responsibility to their families complicated their daily lives.

During the interviews, I asked each girl to walk me through a typical day. They all followed similar routines including getting ready for school, completing household chores, and hanging out with their friends. As Adriana told me, "I wake up in the morning, run around and get ready for school. Go to school. I talk to my friends at lunch and stuff. I have pretty good grades so it's fairly easy for me. And then I come home, watch TV or whatever and go to bed." Their chores included cleaning rooms, doing dishes, cleaning bathrooms, and emptying trash, and chores were also often sources of conflict between girls and mothers. When the girls hung out with friends, they reported listening to music, dancing, watching television, and talking on the phone, either with boys or "prank" calling people as Jessica confessed. Television took up a large part of most of the girls' days, a topic to which I now turn.

3.2.2 The Role of Television

Extensive television use is not uncommon in poor and working class families. As Lareau (2003) suggests, poor and working class children watch more television than middle class children because parents do not have the economic resources necessary to expose their children to a wider range of social and recreational activities. Poor and working class families have more televisions in their homes and children watch more unrestricted amounts of television than in middle class families (Lareau, 2003).

Television watching was a significant part of the girls' lives and one of the most popular past-times for girls, who watched most often in the morning before going to school, when they came home after school, and at night before they went to sleep. They also used television to pass the time with their family members and friends. Both the girls and mothers made reference to television as a means of family bonding. Adriana said she and her mother watched *Grey's Anatomy* and Kasey said she, her mother, and sister watched *The Sopranos* "edited version," *The Gilmore Girls*, and *Seventh Heaven*. Several girls said they watched *American Idol* with their mothers and Amber said her mother told her, "That should be you up there," singing and performing. The mothers also suggested television watching was a way of bonding with their children as Beth described having a "girls' night" with her daughters and friends of their family by watching movies, something to which they all look forward.

Other girls described television watching as a way of bonding with their friends. Rebecca said she went to her friend's house and they made movies on her video camera, mimicking what they saw on shows like *MTV's Real World*. Moreover, the girls also bonded by talking about what they saw on television and often used the content of the shows as a way to flaunt their expertise of the characters they see. For example, in two different focus groups, the

girls had detailed conversations about the lives of celebrities and talked extensively about their childhoods, family issues, and barriers they overcame to be successful. They also knew all the male and female competitors on the shows *Flava of Love* and *I Love New York* and argued over who was the best looking, who displayed the most character, and who was the most worthy of winning.

The extensive use of television in poor and working class homes might be explained by the ways these families structured their lives. In her study of mass media use and social class, Amy Jordan (1992) found that middle class family life consisted of a strict adherence to schedules, formal activities, and rituals, getting ready to start and end the day in the morning and at bedtime, whereas working class living was less structured and ritualistic and multiple tasks were completed simultaneously, i.e., doing homework while eating dinner. These behaviors carried over into media use and consumption. For example, middle class families reserved television viewing for specific times of the day and did not combine it with other activities, whereas working class families were likely to have the television turned on all the time and watched television while eating dinner, doing their homework, and completing household chores. As Jordan (1992: 378) suggests media use in the home reflects the ways in which shared values (in this case, regarding time use and structure) are played out for family members. She argues, through television viewing, practices, and the rules surrounding television viewing, children “learn implicit lessons about how much attention television needs or deserves.” Because middle class families incorporate time limits on television viewing, their children learn to allocate their time to other, educational, physical, or cultural activities. On the contrary, working class parents keep the television on as “background noise” and allow their children to complete other activities while simultaneously watching television; they send a message that television is an important

part of family bonding and daily living. The viewing practices of working class families which are different than those of middle class families, illustrate how poor and working class girls' sense of self can be more heavily influenced by the media.

3.2.3 Family Ties That Bind

Deep emotional ties to extended family members and spending a large amount of time with the family were characteristic of the daily lives of poor and working class girls. As adolescents, the girls were expected to take care of younger children. When I arrived at one home, a thirteen year old participant answered the door casually with a baby on her hip. The ease and comfort with which she held him and directed his behaviors during my visit (the two year old stayed in the room during the entire interview along with me and the girl) illustrated how often adolescent girls are called upon to take care of their younger siblings. Close proximity of extended family members was also typical of many of the families I visited. Aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents lived nearby and stopped in during the interviews. Extended family members sometimes lived with the families I interviewed. Because family was so close, members were frequently counted on as babysitters, laborers for home improvement projects, companions, and most importantly, financial supports.

Bonnie Leadbeater and Niaobe Way (2007: 2) suggest that girls from poor and working class families “often grow up fast, taking on multiple adult roles and responsibilities at young ages.” As I found, this may be because they see family members relying on one another for things like borrowing money in emergencies, working together to do home repairs, raising one another's children, and pooling their resources when crises hit. These girls took care of their younger siblings by helping them get ready for school, babysitting, and keeping them “out of the

way” when adults needed privacy or to do work around the home. They also felt a commitment to take care of their parents, some of whom struggled with drug and alcohol abuse, diabetes, and other illnesses. In addition, they repeated messages from their parents that family should be their most important priority, like Alyssa who said, “[j]ust always like, be together. That’s the way families are supposed to be.” As I will show, the very deep sense of responsibility to their families displayed by the girls presented tensions for them about whether to be self-oriented and directed or to take care of others. While many young people learn a sense of the importance of family, these poor and working class girls learned that taking care of family took precedence in their lives. The time these girls spent taking care of siblings and adult family members took away from the time and energy they had to explore their own interests. They, like many women around them, especially their mothers, worked to fulfill other people’s needs rather than spending time on cultivating their own interests.

Through these interactions with extended family members, the girls may have begun to feel conflicted between being communally directed, i.e., taking on expected roles in this larger family system and being individualistic, i.e., exploring their own interests when perhaps, these interests may be in direct contention with the needs of their families. On one hand, they felt supported by their extended families. On the other, they felt bound by fulfilling the various needs of their extended family members. These tensions were presented ever more clearly in their relationships with their mothers, who primarily socialized the girls into this ethic of care and sense of responsibility to family.

3.2.4 Mother and Daughter Relationships

Despite the girls' negative sentiments towards women and girls as suggested in the discussion of cultural discourses on girlhood, the girls did not feel this way toward female family members. In fact, they cited adult women most frequently as people with whom they spent time, as the most important figures in their lives, and as those they admired. Specifically, the girls said they spent a significant amount of time with grandmothers, female aunts, and female cousins and had especially close and special relationships with their mothers. Many women were involved in these girls' daily lives and it was evident that mothers assumed most responsibility for their girls' daily lives, care giving, and supervision.

Mothers were also more likely than fathers to be involved in their children's schooling and career planning, which has been shown in other research (Griffith and Smith, 2005; Lareau, 2003; and MVEC, 2003). Annete Lareau (2003) for example, suggests that it is mothers, not fathers, who take primary responsibility for major educational decisions in their children's school experiences and Alison Griffith and Dorothy Smith (2005) also found that mothers have historically been primarily involved in their children's schooling as well as supplementary educational and related work in the home. In a local study conducted by the Mon Valley Education Consortium among seventh and eighth graders in 26 local school districts, adolescents consistently cited mothers as their primary source of career information suggesting they converse most often with mothers, more than any other adult, about their futures.

The girls in this study expressed having tight relationships with their mothers that included guidance and support. They said they needed their mothers, relied on them for support when "things get tough," and talked to them about their problems. They expressed joy in the time they spent with their mothers and were accepting of their mothers' expectations, which

often included doing well in school, going to college, being responsible, and “act[ing] like a lady, like don’t be real loud and obnoxious and stuff like a lot of my friends,” as Kassidy told me. The girls repeatedly said they admired their mothers because they are “fun to be around,” someone with whom they could share their problems and concerns, and for some of them, the only parent active in raising them. Anastasia summed up the girls’ admiration for their mothers when she said of her mother,

Somehow she manages to keep the whole house with like four kids and stuff without us all like knocking the house down or whatever. And like, I don't know, she's, I don't really know how to explain it, like she's always been there if I need something. I mean she knows what kind of things I like and don't like, which I think would be hard to do having to memorize for four kids.

Despite popular images of girls defying their parents and having especially conflictual relationships with their mothers, the girls commonly indicated that they and their mothers shared special bonds and relationships. These bonds were evident in the girls’ and mothers’ knowledge of one another’s whereabouts, deep involvement in one another’s personal and social lives, and shared concern for one another’s physical, psychological, and financial well-being. However, these relationships were not conflict-free as girls and mothers talked about tensions including arguments about what the girls wore, where they went, and their talking back to their mothers.

Like their daughters, mothers also offered very positive descriptions of their relationships. Some described their relationships with their daughters as “best friends” and talked about how they helped and guided them through peer pressure and everyday problems. They talked about hanging out with their daughters, going shopping, and hiding purchases from fathers who would be upset if they knew how much money they spent. Many mothers felt it was very important to have a close relationship with their daughters and to communicate with them because they felt they did not do so with their own mothers. However, the mothers did talk

about instances where they argued with their daughters over what they wore, where they went, and who they were with. Several talked about their daughters' "smart mouths," as indicated in Leslie's response when I said, "It sounds like she is independent and determined." Leslie replied, "YES! and I could just knock her out with her mouth. But she is a teenager and you have to expect that." In contrast to Leslie, one can imagine a middle class mother positively reframing her daughter's talking back as an assertion of independence or boundary-pushing, rather than sarcasm and disobedience. Nonetheless, the girls and mothers reported very close relationships with occasional disagreements. Perhaps contributing to these disagreements were the tight living spaces in which they lived.

3.2.5 Tight Living Spaces

The neighborhoods in which the girls lived also represented the potential limitations and boundaries of class. All the girls lacked physical space, which was apparent from the minute I drove up to their homes. Only one of their homes had a driveway. All of the homes had small yards and were so close together that one could probably stand between houses, reach out both arms and touch the two neighboring homes. Families were forced to squeeze their cars into small and limited parking spaces. Inside, the homes were also limited in space. Toys cluttered most living rooms which doubled as home offices and play spaces for younger children. Stacks of papers covered most countertops. I often had to squeeze into a kitchen chair to conduct interviews, and participants often commented on the lack of space in their homes. With each home I went to, I was struck by its resemblance to the last. Baby gates bound young children to certain rooms, shoes sat in front entryways, and signs of wearing were evident in broken screen doors, scuff marks on walls, and comments asking me to "excuse the mess."

Despite tight living quarters, I felt a sense of comfort, maybe because the homes looked like the one in which I was raised. Moms greeted me in sweat pants and pony tails, looking tired and frazzled, but were cheerful and happy to help. Houses smelled like dinner was just cooked (if moms weren't cooking at the time I was there) and kids were busy doing homework or something to keep themselves "out of the way." Walls were decorated with children's art, central to the décor, not hanging on the refrigerator for show or art from international travel as might be featured in a middle class home. The homes were warm; they were lived in by people with rich, full, and busy lives.

Yet, the lack of physical space experienced by the girls potentially created a lack of psychic space for them to figure out who they were and who they wanted to become. As I will show in chapter four, many of the girls commented that they wanted more room because they wanted privacy and autonomy—the ability to make their own choices without interruption or coercion—which they did not get living in small spaces with family members coming in and out of their homes. Moreover, the lack of physical space contributed to the idea of communal, rather than individual living, as the girls' daily lives and choices revolved around what was in the best interest of their families rather than themselves.

3.2.6 Financial Insecurities

Being together so closely and frequently also meant knowing what was going on in one's family. Most of the girls shared a sense of their families' economic insecurities and many articulated this economic instability by saying they knew their parents worried about making ends meet. When I asked her what her parents worry about the most, Natasha told me:

He [her father] worries about more things like the house and my mom worries about the bills...We'd get shut offs [notices their utilities will be shut off]...My dad works so he's worried about feeding us.

Danielle echoed Natasha's sentiments:

I don't know about my mom's boyfriend but, I know my mom is really concerned about being able to pay the bills and stuff. Like cause there's just been troubles in the past so she wants to be financially stable. And be able to financially support me.

Not only did they know that their parents worried about current finances, they also knew their parents were financially limited in how much they could contribute to their daughters' futures. Several of the girls said they knew they couldn't expect their parents to pay for their college education.

These poor and working class girls were often well aware of their family's lack of financial stability, which shaped and was a major part of their everyday lives. While they had very close relationships with their families, they were also likely to be confronted with family barriers and saw their parents pitching in and pooling resources to help extended families (who are part of their everyday life) overcome crises. Conversely, they also saw extended family members having to reciprocate these favors to help their own family. As adolescents, they did what they could to contribute to the well-being of their families and they learned a sense of responsibility for their family members. Moreover, they were aware of the economic insecurities of all of the families around them and knew it would be hard for their own families to contribute financially to their futures.

3.3 THE REALITIES OF POOR AND WORKING CLASS GIRLHOOD

An understanding of the cultural, familial, environmental, and material realities of the girls' lives illustrates how life for poor and working class girls is flooded with contradictions that they negotiate as they decide who they are and who they want to become. These girls negotiated images of contemporary girlhood that rely on traditional notions of femininity, tout independence and individualism (*Girl Power*), and simultaneously pathologize girlhood (*Mean Girl*), feeding parents and schools with a myth that girls' behaviors should be more closely monitored. They went to their families for support, especially their mothers. While they had very close relationships with their families, they were also likely to be confronted with family barriers. Their mothers, older sisters, and friends had unexpected pregnancies and became teen mothers. Their family members suffered from drug and alcohol abuse and illness. They saw their parents pitching in and pooling resources to help their extended families overcome crises. They lived in tight, crowded spaces, which bound and limited their autonomy. They pitched in to contribute to the well-being of their families and learned a sense of responsibility for their family members. Often, girls learned to live communally with their families, at the potential expense of developing their own separate identity, and at the same time were well aware of financial insecurity. These factors and everyday actions and interactions shaped the girls sense of who they were, which then affects who they think they can become.

What follows in the next chapters is a description of who the girls want to become and how they think they can get there. In chapter four, I present the girls' aspirations, paying specific attention to how media, school and family milieu shape but result in different aspirations for poor and working class girls. In chapter five, I examine how girls are beginning to realize their

aspirations, and illustrate the importance of resources and capital girls have themselves and find within their families and schools.

4.0 WHO DO THE GIRLS WANT TO BECOME?

In their book, *Making Modern Lives: Subjectivity, Schooling, and Social Change*, Amy MacLeod and Julie Yates (2006: 102) see the aspirations of young people as concerns for policymakers and school administrators who too often rely on “survey-based data on what young people think” and “answers given to such questions as ‘What do you want to be when you leave school?’ to understand adolescent career aspirations. According to MacLeod and Yates these officials discount the complex processes whereby aspirations are shaped. Aspirations are formed within various contexts and interactions. How aspirations are shaped provides insight into the ways that gender, social class, and race matter in the lives and futures of young people. In chapter three I examined how girls negotiated cultural discourses about girlhood, poor and working class familial practices, and their physical and economic environments to provide insight into who the girls are currently. In this chapter, I examine who the girls want to become by considering the factors that shape girls’ “possible selves” (Kerpelman, et. al., 2002: 289). That is, I show how poor and working class girls set goals for themselves in the contexts of their daily interactions with television, family, and school (Kerpelman, et. al, 2002). I show how gendered, classed, and race-based practices within these contexts influence girls’ perceptions of their futures in both positive and negative ways. Contrary to the practices of policy-makers and school administrators, I argue that understanding the contexts in which aspirations are formed is more informative than knowing the specific careers to which young people aspire.

I first examine the factors that influence the girls' aspirations including television, family, and schools and show how gendered, classed, and race-based practices within these contexts influence girls' perceptions of their futures. I then discuss the specific education and career aspirations of the girls, highlighting how gender, class, and race inform their commitment to gaining higher education and desire to work but result in different aspirations that are difficult to explain. Next, I show how the girls' familial aspirations are informed by their learned commitment to family and communal ideals but often conflict with their education and career goals. I then show how their career and material aspirations compare to their mothers' lives. Finally, I discuss how ideologies of gender, class, and racial equality both influence aspirations and mask structural constraints that the girls may encounter.

4.1 CAREER INFLUENCES OF POOR AND WORKING CLASS GIRLS

In this section, I show how gendered, classed, and race-based practices within the contexts of television, family, and school inform the girls' aspirations. I suggest that while television informs the perceptions of all young people, it can be both a useful and damaging source of information for poor and working class girls who are exposed to occupations of which they may not be aware, but too often see make believe jobs that do not reflect the realities of the labor market and erroneous portrayals of women's work experiences. Their parents and other adults have limited knowledge of these jobs to counter these inaccurate images. I also suggest that in the family there are strong gendered, classed, and racialized practices in the home that impact the girls' aspirations. Poor and working class mothers pass on traditional beliefs about women's work in the home while simultaneously teaching girls the necessity of obtaining a

higher education and contributing to family income. Messages mothers give to their girls about work also differ for white and African American girls and reflect racially discriminating experiences encountered by African American mothers. Finally, I suggest that poor and working class girls report limited opportunities to explore career interests in school perhaps due to limited school funding, and see little connection between school and work. This is exacerbated by mothers who also have difficulty seeing this connection.

4.1.1 The Influence of Television

In our media-saturated society, young people draw ideas about their possible selves from what they see on television. In my Master's thesis I found that although girls said parents helped shape their ideas, they talked more often about television influencing their future career choices. Girls who wanted to be veterinarians, for example, went into great detail about the various jobs they have seen on the Animal Planet Channel. Moreover, results of a study conducted by a local non-profit organization (Mon Valley Education Consortium, 2003) revealed that girls were more likely than boys to say they obtained ideas about careers from television.

When I interviewed girls in this study, I solicited information about their television viewing habits and spent a lot of time talking with them about the specific shows they watched. Not only was this a great way to establish rapport, it also gave girls a sense of authority as they had vast amounts of knowledge of a range of television programs. They all watched television daily. Even those who said they did not watch television would eventually, during the interview, recite complete details of programs they had seen. The content of the shows they watched ranged from child-like to extreme adult content and all influenced their ideas about their own futures. There were no racial differences in the number of girls referencing television as sources

of career ideas. Both white and African American girls said they obtained career ideas from occupations they saw on television. For example, Danielle, a white girl, who wanted to be a forensic scientist, fantasized of working in a role she saw on television. She said that when she watches *Law and Order*, especially “the parts where they do the lab stuff, it kind of makes me want to be in the forensics field.” Similarly, Natasha, an African American girl, who aspired to play for the WNBA, watched basketball games on television and pictured herself playing in these games. She said, “I’ll watch this one girl from Tennessee...her last name is Parker. When I’m watching the games I will see how she made that land and I’ll be like, ‘Oh, I wanna do that.’ I see how she hit that twist and I will sometimes be talking to myself like ‘Oh, you see that girl! I don’t wanna look like that.’” Other girls also said there were people on television that they wanted to be like including doctors and pop singers.

Other girls said that television did not play an influential role over their lives or decisions, yet they often cited television shows as their inspirations for their future careers. This was the case for both white and African American girls. Some of the girls in this study wanted to be professional athletes, actresses, and forensic scientists and many girls’ ideas about their future material lifestyle were inspired by those of celebrities. For example, when I asked Elaina, who aspired to be a social worker, if there was anyone on television that she wanted to be like, she said, “No. I think a lot of them people are fake and I don’t like any of them.” However, later in the interview she said, “I want to work with children when I get older, so a lot of them shows like *CSI* and the things about kids that get raped and stuff, like, that’s what I want to be, help counsel kids and stuff like that.” While Elaina said she did not want to be like anyone famous, she revealed that she wanted to emulate the roles of characters on one of her favorite shows. Similarly, Kasey, who either wanted to be a cosmetologist or a forensic scientist, resisted images

in popular media, particularly reality shows, but said her career ideas came directly from television. When I asked her if she watched reality shows on *MTV* as most other girls reported she said, “No. I was real deep into *MTV* and I stopped watching *MTV*, because there's nothing good on there. Like the messages they send out you [can] have sex before you're married, drink, go out and be gay, it's not right by the Bible so I just don't watch them anymore.” Later in the interview when I asked her where she learned of the idea to become a cosmetologist, she said, “Well I was watching *Trading Spaces* and I wanted to be an interior designer and then I also started watching *What Not To Wear* on *TLC* and that's just where I got it from.” Television also influenced her idea to become a crime scene investigator as she said, “*CSI*. That's my favorite show... the girl, Callie on there, I pretend that's me... Oh I love that show... I know it's gross to go see the dead people but you know you're going to find out who killed them and put them away... it's so awesome... and I also want to be a beautician on the side... that's what I want to do.” While Kasey criticized reality shows on *MTV*, she was heavily influenced by shows on other cable channels. Finally, Danae, who wanted to be a doctor but also enjoyed singing, was adamant that her career ideas would not come from television. She said, “They just put people on those shows [reality television] to watch them squirm.” She went on to say, “Most of the time I can't learn from anybody who's thirty years old really... and plus, they can't even see you and they can't really teach you anything. They don't give advice.” However, later in the interview she said that she aspired to be like Alicia Keys (an almost 30 year old R&B singer) because “she inspired me to start singing... and, she's kind of like a regular person.”

In sum, the girls reported obtaining ideas about future possibilities from the media, even when some said media did not and should not impact their decisions. There were no racial

differences in media influences on girls' occupational aspirations. However, media did influence the girls' perceived lifestyle aspirations.

While many young people, regardless of social class, probably get information about future possibilities through the media, television is an inadequate source of career information, especially for poor and working class girls. They made several references to television shows where they saw "cool jobs" that they might like to have in the future including crime scene investigator, as seen on *CSI*, professional basketball player, as seen in televised WNBA games, actress/entertainer, and lawyer. But these girls are aspiring to make-believe jobs, since television emphasizes glamorous and exciting aspects of these jobs, rather than the day-to-day tasks of the worker. Girls who are influenced by shows like *CSI* want to become crime scene investigators because they think they will have plenty of opportunities to crack high-profile cases and capture serial murderers. Poor and working class young people, probably more so than middle class youth, are susceptible to misunderstanding what these jobs entail because their parents are not likely to hold these jobs and lack the knowledge of what these jobs actually entail. They may not know other family members or friends who are in these types of jobs and may believe what they see on television.

Perhaps more discouraging than the inaccurate portrayal of jobs by the media is that girls are often attracted to "exciting" jobs but lack knowledge about the job's feasibility in the larger labor market. For example, girls who reported wanting to be a veterinarian, crime scene investigator, professional athlete, etc., lacked an awareness of the labor market realities for those kinds of jobs. Consider how the television-sparked mania of forensic science has created a wide interest among jobseekers for criminal investigative type of work. This is illustrated locally in Pittsburgh among numerous colleges and universities who have created new programs in

Forensic Nursing, Forensic Accounting, Criminal Investigation, etc. to meet the interest. What these girls were not equipped to understand is just because the training exists, does not mean there are actual jobs available in those fields upon graduation. These girls, who may pursue such interests, are making uninformed decisions about future possibilities for work. While the media may broaden their minds about possibilities for the future to which they might otherwise have never been exposed, it presents a very unrealistic version of the day-to-day tasks of these jobs and can lure young people into training for jobs that do not exist in the labor market.

Television also influences girls' aspirations in particular ways through *Girl Power* and *Mean Girl* images. Girls who aspire to careers they see portrayed by women in shows like *CSI* and *Law and Order* see women who are emotionally strong, in pursuit of career success, and at the same time thin, sexy, and beautiful. They embody *Girl Power*. Often women in these shows are at the top of their career ladders and equal to men, which reinforces the myth that gender discrimination does not exist and exhibits American ideals that education and hard work catapult women to the top. Moreover, even though these women often have families, they are rarely shown attending to family life, suggesting to girls that balancing work and family will not be something they have to confront. These shows also illustrate *Mean Girl* images. Many of the women who are in positions of power, like those on *Grey's Anatomy*, are self-serving and mean, which is not the way to be empowered in the workplace. *Mean Girl* characters are glamorous, sexy, and successful, but often cold, unemotional, competitive, and unable to get along with other women. Girls aspiring to be like the women they see on television get mixed messages of power and manipulation which may be difficult to negotiate in the labor market.

While television informs the career perceptions of all young people it is particularly damaging for poor and working class girls career ideas because they are aspiring to make-believe

jobs and the people who surround them may not be knowledgeable about what these jobs entail. More importantly, these jobs do not reflect the realities of the labor market and because their parents and other adults also have limited knowledge of these jobs because of their own social class backgrounds, the girls aren't being taught that these jobs (and how they are presented on television) do not exist. Finally, women on television often embody *Girl Power* and *Mean Girl* images giving girls a sense that they can achieve, but minimizing what it takes to do so. Television is not the only factor that shapes these girls' sense of their possible selves. As I show in the next section, parents and extended family members also play a large role.

4.1.2 The Influences of Family Members

Several studies suggest that working class children who grow up with limited exposure to occupational success are less likely than middle class children, surrounded by people who have made it, to have their ambitions become a reality. Middle class children know many people—their parents, their friends' parents, and family and community members—who hold professional careers and provide a model of career-oriented decisions like participating in study abroad and delaying employment to pursue advanced education. In contrast, poor and working class children have few such role models. While the adults in their lives instruct them to achieve higher income and higher status occupations than they did, they face barriers to such achievement, including different values about work.

Jennifer Johnson (2002) shows how class-specific barriers and values impact the career choices, opportunities, and decision-making of white working class women and girls. When her study participants were young, they received overt and covert messages about what was possible for the future. Their parents passed on what she calls a habitus that “valued common sense”

(205) which included both an acknowledgement of the family's financial status as well as parental emphasis on practical, specific, concrete skills that are necessary for survival in a working class context. As young women, they learned the financial strains they placed on their families and decided that the practical thing to do was to go to work and "make their own way" (205). Even those who aspired to higher education, intending to pay for it themselves, found that marriage, pregnancy, and children slowly decreased those possibilities. From childhood through their adult lives, these women learned to rule out and/or compromise their childhood aspirations.

Sherlon Brown (1996) suggests that as African American adolescent girls age, regardless of social class, their occupational goals are more likely than white girls to decrease because "occupational aspirations are adjusted to conform to the perceived realities of one's actual chances for achieving desired goals" (93). This leveling-off of aspirations occurs because young African American girls witness women in their families and communities struggling to negotiate familial responsibilities and work and incurring high rates of teen pregnancy. Moreover, seeing women around them in low-paying jobs leads them to see the labor market as discriminatory and so they conclude they have little chances to compete for good jobs.

The ways that family and community members complicate poor and working class girls' achievement of their goals are subtle. There are strong gendered, classed, and racialized practices in the home that impact the girls' aspirations. In the next section, I show how mothers pass on strong gender-traditional beliefs about women's work in the home and labor force. In doing so, they teach girls a value of caring that complicates their career decision-making. I then discuss how their social class position influenced girls' families to have high hopes for their upward social mobility and so they stressed educational attainment and a strong work ethic. All mothers passed on values about work, related to their positions in the home and on the job but

white and African American mothers passed on different values resulting from racist experiences African American mothers encountered. Finally, I suggest that while mothers inadvertently teach their daughters values about work, they really see their role as merely supportive of their daughters' aspirations because they have limited knowledge of careers. However, due to "mistakes" they believe they have made in their own relationships with men, they have the authority to steer their daughters from not relying on men for their financial well-being.

4.1.2.1 Familial Practices: Teaching Girls to Care

Both white and African American mothers drew on their own home and work experiences to inform their daughters' career ideas and thus passed on gendered ideas of work. Leslie, who worked in food service, said that her daughter often commented on the revealing clothing her mother wore to work: "She will look at my outfits and she will be like, 'Mom you are going to get some big tips,' and I am like 'Well we need money this week honey.' You know I joke around about stuff like that but I tell her, it's hard work." Leslie also commented on her daughter's keen ability to serve others when she reflected on a church fundraiser in which they participated.

When we did the spaghetti dinner she was serving. She would be so good at it. She would make a lot of money. I wouldn't want to send her that way because if she got a taste of that money, do that 7 days a week, it's a \$50,000 job. But that's not what I want for her. That's not what I wanted for my sisters, but it's applicable for them because of the little ones. When you have little ones, it's a great job because you are not missing out.

Leslie did not want her daughter to work as a server because it lacked the prestige and educational level she wanted for her daughter, even though she knew she would be good at it, could make a substantial wage, and would be able to easily balance work and family. She hoped her daughter would do differently than she and other female adults in their family and have a

career before having children. At the same time, Leslie taught her daughter two important, gendered, lessons. The first was that sexuality matters on the job and can be profited from, i.e., dress seductively and you can earn a lot of money. The second was to be concerned with balancing work and family and not ‘missing out’ on raising her children. In suggesting this before her daughter even chose a career path, she assured that her daughter would be responsible for taking care of her children and that caretaking should be a consideration when she chooses a career. Embedded in these messages were also class-based understandings of living. Leslie’s comment that “We need the money,” illustrated the financial struggles her family faced as well as a lesson that these struggles could be dealt with by using her female sexuality.

Barb, a mother who worked as an educational assistant, also sent a message to her daughter that gender mattered in the world of work by encouraging her to choose a job that would allow her to balance work and family. She suggested to her daughter that “[Teaching] It’s a good mother job.” She said her daughter wanted to be a cosmetologist and “have a big family” allowing her both a career and children. Barb agreed that her daughter’s decision to be a cosmetologist and have own her own shop at home would enable her to do both, even though she expected her daughter also to earn a college degree. Moreover, Barb said that her daughter appreciated that she was able to be home with her own children: “That’s something that she always thanks me for. She always says, ‘Mom I’m so glad, I don’t care if we don’t have as much financially as other people but I’m so glad you’re home with us.’” Barb told her daughter to go to college, but also told her to follow in her footsteps by aspiring to a career like teaching or cosmetology that would enable her to stay at home to take care of her children. Her daughter saw the benefits of having a job that enabled a woman to be home with her children and appreciated her mother for always being there, even if it compromised the family income.

Finally, Beth influenced her daughter's aspirations by drawing on traditional gender roles that also had underlying class-based assumptions. Her daughter wanted to be a massage therapist, but Beth objected that "they don't make any money." So, as Beth said, she "kind of eased her out of that," persuading her that she is "such a people person" and "can do anything dealing with the public" and pushed her towards health care where "there's always openings." Beth was a nurse and while she wanted her daughter to achieve more than herself financially, she still drew upon traditionally feminine characteristics, i.e., good communication skills and working with people, to push her toward a career in health care.

Young people do not develop career ideas solely or even primarily out of personal interest, but instead consider what is possible based on their current, everyday experiences. The girls' aspirations were closely related to the traditional gender roles they learned in their families as well as their understanding that they needed to contribute to the family income more substantially than their mothers did. Moreover, the caring work that both white and African American girls learned in their families strongly influenced their career aspirations. Elaina, who wanted to be a social worker, and Kyra, who aspired to be a pediatrician, said they wanted these careers because they loved and wanted to help children. Both of these girls discussed being influenced by experiences they had in their own families taking care of children. Kyra explained,

When I was younger, I used to watch my little sister and my brother, he was a little baby at that time and by that I learned that I am good at watching babies, taking care of babies. And when she [little sister] was sick or something and my little brother or my baby sister now, I usually know what's wrong with them. I don't know I am just in love with babies.

Like Elaina and Kyra, Keyanna had aspirations that evoked traditional gender roles of caring. She wanted to be a psychologist because she enjoyed "helping people." She said,

Everyone always comes to me with their problems right, so I try to guide people whatever. And then like I've been doing it since I was young and then after a while, I was I guess I was leading people to the right path or something cause everyone was like, you should be a psychologist because you told me this and daddada...I don't know I just like to help people and I just enjoy doing that. I don't know but I just do.

These girls were inspired by the caretaking roles they took on in their homes and interactions with friends because they enjoyed "helping" and "taking care" and were positively reinforced by their loved ones when they did so. But for other girls, the aspiration to care came out of traumatic events they experienced in their homes. For example, when I asked Danielle why she wanted to be a social worker she said,

Well, you're probably going to think I'm like a nut but, I've had social workers come and they had to talk to me. Like CYS [Children and Youth Services] and stuff. I used to hate them cause I thought they were going to take me away from my family...But for the most part I've noticed they were nice and they do get to work with children and people and I want to be able to help people as much as I can. And even though it's like a small part, to me, it feels like I'm doing something important.

Danielle's aspirations were influenced by the care she received from social workers in her life, which she in turn hoped to do for another child. Similarly, Amber reported that she wanted to be a veterinarian to help abused animals. She shared a story about her mother's boyfriend facilitating a "pit bull fight" in which her own dog participated, a sport which often results in injury or death of dogs. She described her empathy for dogs, "Pit bulls, they be jacked up because they try to put them in fights and try to win some money on them and there is abusive people that abuse their animals." As a result of her personal experiences, Amber wanted to care for animals and save them from harm.

Through strong familial responsibilities, emulating their mothers' life and work experiences, and their own life experiences, poor and working class girls learn to care for the

people around them. Many of them were already responsible for taking care of family members and they expressed pride in being a good friend by listening to their peers “problems.” While all girls learn the importance and the techniques of caring for others, poor and working class girls learn from mothers whose caring roles extend from the home into the workforce in “pink collar” occupations that require care work. All of the mothers in this study participated in caring roles in and outside of the home, for no pay and modest pay, and family members and friends positively reinforced these girls when they did care work. Moreover, their mothers shared their satisfaction with jobs in which they cared for clients and patients. They often discussed the relationships they formed with the clients they “served,” telling daughters about physically disabled children with whom they worked, teens in trouble whom they helped, and getting to know people in their service positions. Caring was a common factor when mothers talked about their jobs. That the girls internalized the value of caring is evident in the way they talked about taking care of their own families and their future careers.

Regardless of race, caring for others is a factor poor and working class girls consider as they perceive their future careers. This may also be the case for middle class girls, as all girls are socialized to care, but working class girls may be more likely to emulate mothers who are in caring roles at home and in the workforce. Moreover, even as middle class girls learn from their mothers how to care in the home, they are also presented with other career options that do not involve care work. Poor and working class girls learn to value caring in both the home and their occupations because they draw from their experience and what they see is their mothers’ lives. At the same time, they balance these ideas of caring with messages from family and community that they should make a higher income than do the adults who surround them.

4.1.2.2 Family Practices: Hoping for Social Class Mobility

Mothers also passed on that they wanted their daughters to be better off financially than they were. Cheri, a food service worker, said “Well, I definitely know, all my children know, I don’t want them [working] in no food services,” indicating that the physical aspects of the job and low pay are difficult to bear, although she also said that a manager she knew at the local McDonald’s could give her children jobs. Similarly, Beth, a nurse, encouraged her daughter to do better financially than she had. She summarized most mothers’ feelings about their daughters’ future incomes when she said, “The only thing I did tell them that is that if they don’t make more money than me, then I will have failed.”

Mothers felt that the key to making more money was for their daughters to focus on completing their high school education and/or pursuing higher education. Julie said,

I always tell her to go to school because I sure in the heck don't make no money...
So if you don't have an education, you're going to be working like me, making
crap, and having to work two jobs. But whatever she wants to do. I just, try to
enforce that. I mean I can't make her go to college, but I want her to go to.

Amy, whose daughter wanted to be cosmetologist, thought that her daughter should go to college but use her cosmetology skills to make extra money. She said, “I just could see her going further [than a cosmetology career]. I wish she would learn it and get through college by doing it, but I wish she wouldn’t think of it as a lifelong- it’s something when you have babies you could stay home and take care, but I think she could do something else.” Amy knew that cosmetology could yield a modest amount of money, and perhaps be a useful skill when her daughter was raising her children, but thought her daughter would be better off financially if she pursued a college degree.

Because the mothers felt that getting an education would enable their daughters’ financial stability, they instilled in their daughters strong educational values, especially the need to attend

college. Leslie, a mother of two, was adamant about her children going to college. She said, “All I ever think about is how I am going to get them through college. They *are* going to college.” Similarly, Kira instilled the value of a college education in her daughter by setting her hopes on her. She said, “I tell her, ‘I didn’t get to go to college and your sister, she don’t even want to go to high school’ and I am like ‘*somebody gotta make, somebody gotta do it!*’ So I think she really feels the pressure from me.” All the mothers wanted their daughters to go to college and all the girls said they wanted to go to college, a sign that credentialism, defined by Frank Furedi (2007: 84) as “the expansion of paper degrees” has found its way into the poor and working classes. Poor and working class mothers want their daughters to go to college but most do not have first hand experience with higher education to discuss or guide them. These mothers were caught in a bind. They knew they could not afford to pay for their daughters’ college but if their daughters did not attend college, they could end up in the low-paying service occupations that they occupy. As a result, they gave their daughters positive messages about higher education.

Fiona Devine (2004) interviewed middle class adults (some whom were economically mobile themselves and others who were raised in middle class families) and found that while all parents valued educational success, working class parents thought education was important for getting a good job, whereas middle class parents valued and appreciated learning for self-development and expanding one’s worldview. She found that not only did working class families emphasize hard work and discipline, but “these values shaped family lifestyles” (70). As one of her participants said, “It wasn’t education for education’s sake, it was education to find a job” (72). Conversely, participants who came from “long-established” middle class families valued “high culture,” and learned to find entertainment and educational value in travel, reading

and music, and intellectually “engaging in the world around them” (71). Moreover, Devine found that even as working class parents placed a high value on education they hoped their children would go to college (as Kira indicated above when she said “somebody has got to do it!” and Julie iterated “I can’t make her go to college, but I want her to go”) while middle class parents presumed that their children would go to college.

Since mothers of the girls in this study had limited college experience, they used work experiences to instill the value of a strong work ethic. Tina believed her daughter needed to learn about work at an early age. She said,

Well I’ve always worked, I’ve always had a job, since I was fifteen, and that’s really what she has to do... cause she thinks that she can just sit around and everybody’s going to give her what she wants because that’s what’s happened all her life. At a certain point you can’t do that no more. You know, you have to rely on yourself and nobody else.

Similarly, Barb believed she and her husband set a good example for her daughter. “We do jobs that are not glamorous or sometimes have to work hard and I think that as she gets older she’ll develop a good work ethic based on what she sees. She knows that we both put a high value on working and doing whatever it is that you have to do.” Other mothers also taught their girls about hard work by example. As Anita said, through her own behaviors, her daughter “can see that working is what you’re supposed to do. You’re supposed to set a schedule. You’re supposed to iron your clothes when you get home, supposed to take your bath. You’re supposed to go over your homework.” Similarly, Sylvia described leading by example: “She knows how important it is to go to work... she sees me going to work everyday and she knows I don’t call off or I’m not late.”

Other studies have shown that middle class mothers teach their girls different values about work than do working class mothers (MacLeod and Yates, 2006, Kindlon, 2006, Devine,

2004, Lareau, 2003). Middle class mothers teach their girls a work ethic but their “major preoccupation is that their children find individual self-fulfillment and happiness in their jobs” (Devine, 2004: 105). As a result, middle class mothers organize their children’s leisure time to “keep them on track,” compete for middle class positions, be self-motivated and personally responsible, explore their talents and interests, and learn to enjoy learning and growing (Devine, 2004: 101). Unlike working class girls who learn that a work ethic means being responsible to employers and following the rules, middle class girls learn a “can-do” attitude through self-fulfillment and growth.

While all mothers in this study taught their girls dispositions toward education and work ethics, this was done so differently by race. African American mothers were more concerned than white mothers with teaching their girls to follow rules at work. Perhaps this is because African American mothers experienced racially discriminatory treatment that threatened their job stability, whereas their white counterparts did not. For example, when I asked Anita, an African American woman, if she liked one of her former jobs she said,

I loved the job until the director was fired, and she was fired because she had too many African Americans working there. They couldn’t get rid of me because I had enough time there but they made it crazy. And then they got this lady that was outright, she said, ‘the only thing a Black could do for me is wipe my butt.’ I said, ‘This ain’t going to last long.’ My best friend, I got her hired down there, and she called human resources on some of the statements she made, and she [the director] got me fired because she said I was more of a supervisor and I didn’t use my supervisor qualities. I wasn’t even a supervisor. We had a supervisor. And I was fired. I had finally figured out that it was a Black and white issue.

Shakira, also an African American mother, instilled a strong work ethic in her daughter primarily by teaching her to follow the rules. She said that her work experiences have been “good, but not so good recently” and discussed “conflicts and issues” she was having on the job. She concluded that while she might not be able to help her daughter with the skills necessary for a particular

job, she can teach her “how to keep a job.” Similarly, Vivian, an African American mother discussed the interplay of a strong work ethic and following the rules on the job. In describing her job she said,

It’s like we are in military camp and we are civilians and people say, “Do do do,” and we are not used to do that cause we are not trained that way but in order to keep your job you have to *OBEY*. It’s not like you think, ‘I be kissing somebody’s butt’ but that is me surviving, keeping my job. Not letting them be able to take it away from me, cause if I didn’t do it, they might be sending me home and then we might not have food because I might be suspended for a week because I didn’t obey something that was so trivial and so simple.

One reason Vivian worked so hard was that she feared she could lose her job if she didn’t. She taught her daughter that working hard and being responsible was how to keep a job. Sylvia, also African American, prepared her daughter for close supervision at work by helping her behave responsibly in preparation for the workforce. She said, “Yesterday I told her, she got a ‘My Space’ account and I told her that a lot of employers are looking at that now, ‘so watch what you put on there’ ... because if you are looking for a job, employers are looking on the website to see what you have out there.” Kira, an African American woman, said that she talked to her daughters about racial discrimination in the workforce and taught them about employers’ racially discriminating hiring practices. She said, “It’s just sad like a lot of organizations, companies whatever, can get your applications and just look at your name ah ha! ah ha! and say, “Whoop!,” and *I got a ghetto name!* I really do, and you see that and you know. That’s just real life. That’s the life that we live and that’s just real so I only can give my kids what’s real.” African American mothers, like white mothers, taught their girls to have a strong work ethic, but they also taught them to strictly follow the rules on the job, so that they could “keep” their jobs.

4.1.2.3 Family Practices: Don't Rely on Men

While mothers inadvertently taught daughters to care and the importance of education and a strong work ethic, they often claimed that they did not directly tell their daughters what they should aspire to be. Instead, they saw their role as a supporter in their girl's life decisions, but felt strongly about their daughters making their own decisions, especially when it came to education and career choices. As Trudy told me when I asked if she told her daughter which courses to take in school, "No, she chooses what she wants to take. I don't want—if she did bad in something that I made her take, I'd feel terrible. And I don't want it to come back on me. I think that she's old enough to be making her own choice." Trudy illustrated how the mothers felt their daughters needed to make decisions and learn from their own mistakes. Similarly, Shakira also talked about teaching her daughter lessons by withdrawing from her educational decisions,

All through school up until sixth, seventh grade, I was holding her hand literally. And you know, we'd sit and we still do homework together but I let her do her thing... But she really now has had to learn, I had to let go. Because otherwise... she's not going to be able to do it on her own if I'm sitting here with her.

It is likely that these mothers did not try to influence their daughters' education and career decision-making because they had limited experience in school and higher education. However, they were not afraid to talk to their daughters about how the decisions they made in relationships with boys and would later make with men could impact their futures. As illustrated above, mothers closely monitored their daughters' potential sexual behaviors and decisions with boys. They also gave their daughters consistent messages not to rely on men for financial well-being. As Julie told her daughter, "It is better that you can take care of yourself so you don't have to depend on no stupid guys." Amy also gave her daughter the same message, "I always tell her to

do it so that you, not that I have to rely on [my husband], but I would like to see her make it so that if she doesn't ever wanna settle down she doesn't have too. Marry for the right reasons, you know." Many mothers were experts on what they viewed as making "mistakes" with men as they lived through unexpected and early pregnancies, young marriages, and for some, single motherhood, causing them to level off their own education and career goals. Underlying these sentiments was the mothers' lived financial experience. Whether they lived in a single or two-parent family, money was always tight. They knew that their girls would have to work as adults. More importantly, they felt their daughters could not depend on men to bring them financial stability. Therefore, they talked candidly to their daughters about being able to support themselves.

It is important to point out the contradictory behaviors of mothers who wanted to let their girls make their own education and career decisions but did not want them to make the same mistakes they made with boys/men. When they discussed their daughters' education and career decision-making, mothers drew on a universal, middle class cultural construction that children should be raised to be independent and personally responsible for their success and failure. However, they knew from personal experience that if their girls made a mistake in their relationships with boys, they would feel more damaging consequences than would be the case for a middle class girl specifically because they knew that they could not remediate the consequences of "poor" decision-making as easily as could a middle class family that would have the economic resources to do so. This is a class bind: they talked of middle class values of independence, hard work, and personal responsibility because they did not feel equipped to have a direct hand in their daughters' education and career decisions and rarely acknowledged the structural barriers their daughters might face, but did feel equipped to closely monitor their

decisions with boys because many of them confronted unwanted and early pregnancies or economic crises in their own families. These mothers tried to manage the best they could under circumstances not of their own making, which pulled them in contrasting directions as they steered their daughters into the future. At the same time, they created contradictions for their daughters, where daughters wanted to become like their mothers and take care of family members, but did not want to be like mothers in education and career decisions. Mothers supported their daughters but without practical knowledge of education and career systems and instead offered advice to protect and monitor their daughters' sexuality, offering practical knowledge they have learned from their own experiences, which are both gendered and classed versions of what's in their daughters' best interest. The girls recognized and appreciated how much their mothers were looking out for them but often felt bounded by their close supervision.

In the family, there are strong gendered, classed, and race-based practices that impact girls' aspirations. Mothers pass on strong gender-traditional beliefs about women's work in the home and labor force by teaching girls a value of caring that complicates their career decision-making. Families have high hopes for their daughters' upward social mobility and stress educational attainment and a strong work ethic. Mothers teach their daughters to work hard and be personally responsible but because of discriminatory workplace practices faced by African American mothers, they also teach their daughters to follow rules on the job, and how to keep their jobs. They also stress the importance of economic self-sufficiency for their daughters and being wary of how relationships with boys can alter one's career outcomes, because they know that it is faulty to rely on a man for financial support. The family largely shapes girls aspirations, in gendered, classed, and racialized ways. In addition to family influences, schools are believed to be highly influential. A topic to which I now turn.

4.1.3 The Influence of School

While research like that of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Barbara Schneider (2000) suggests that young people's career ideas are shaped by the schools they attend, most girls said little about school and teachers influencing their specific career ideas, although, as discussed in chapter five, several said school personnel are helping them move toward their future goals. The lack of school influence on aspirations stems from the girls' age (they may have more exposure to careers in school as they enter high school) and few career education opportunities available in schools since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002.

NCLB has received much criticism for having caused schools, especially those with many low-income and minority children to "teach to the test" because school funding depends on student scores in standardized testing (National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2007). The implications of NCLB are felt more detrimentally in poor and working class schools where the threat of funding cuts pushes teachers away from teaching career exploration and more toward meeting math and reading proficiency levels. When girls have limited exposure to career ideas within schools, and the family cannot compensate for this lack of exposure as indicated above, girls are likely to see little connection between current schooling and future career goals.

When I asked if what they were learning in school related to their futures, girls overwhelmingly said "no." For example, while Danielle understood that math could help her obtain a career in forensic science, her other option was to become a social worker and she believed that "nothing that I'm learning right now is necessary in helping me reach that goal." Similarly, Keyanna did not believe that what she was doing in school related to her future. She

said, “I don’t see any connection...because like middle school, everybody knows that middle school doesn’t count and neither does elementary.” For other girls like Amber, who wanted to be a veterinarian, the disconnect between school and future work was particularly problematic. When I asked her if she liked science she said, “No.” When I followed up by suggesting if she wanted to work with animals, maybe she was more interested in science than she thought, she replied, “What’s animals got to do with science?” Like many of the girls in this study, Amber saw no connection between her current schooling and future career.

Certainly the age of these girls (13-14 years old) was a factor. As they get older, they will probably learn more about specific careers in school. Their age is also likely to affect their understanding of connections between their current schooling and future careers. Nonetheless, most of them lacked even basic information on careers, which became even more apparent when we discussed the characteristics of specific occupations.

I asked girls to state the careers to which they aspired and describe who could have that job, its educational requirements, income, and tasks. A few said they “have no idea” how much and what type of education they needed to obtain their career aspiration while most were only minimally informed. For example, while Elaina said she had an opportunity to learn more about her career aspiration by completing a project at school, she also said the project was not something that she took seriously. She said,

I mean I’ve researched it and I’ve heard about it from people. But I never really got into it to see what specific classes I would have to take or anything like that...We had to do a project on what we wanted to be when we got older. So it was just like pretty much, just getting on the internet and printing out an article type thing. Like nothing really serious.

Similarly, Jamyra said that she wanted to be a pediatrician and suggested that “you gotta take the state test and pass it.” But when I asked her how much schooling was necessary to become a

pediatrician, she said, “Between three or four years or like five or something like that. Then you have to go to this little job training and then you have to pass that or something like that.” Brittany was also unaware of the requirements for her particular career interest. She wanted to be an entertainer, and when I asked her how much money she would make as an entertainer, or as she referred to it, “a star,” she said, “A star makes from \$50,000 to \$100,000 a year. I think. I’m not sure. Dress code is whatever. I think their hours, I can’t remember and they have to go to four different colleges. I can’t remember what they are though.” Keyanna, who wanted to become a psychologist, was also unaware of the requirements for her chosen career. When I asked her how one became a psychologist she said she was, “not exactly” sure “but I am guessing you have to go to college.” Finally, when I asked Serena, who wanted to be a cosmetologist, if she needed to go to school to do so, she said, “*NO!* Well, some people have talent like that but if you want to do hair for celebrities and all that you gotta, I think you gotta go to college.”

Just as the girls were uninformed of the schooling required for particular careers, so too were they unaware of what working in the job would be like. When I asked Danielle, who aspired to be a forensic scientist, where forensic scientists worked, she said, “All they said when I was researching was you kind of have to find like a location that is more needing of it. But I don’t know, what type of like, umm place I go through. Like I guess I think they were kind of, on the Internet, talking about going through the police and stuff.” Moreover, the girls were not getting exposure to this career information in school. As Rebecca said, she knew she needed to take health classes to pursue her interest in being a dentist, but then said that in school they do not focus on health classes. She said, “We don’t really have it [health class] all that often. But when we do have it, we have it every once in a while. Because sometimes it’s like, our gym

teacher decides whether that period is going to be gym or health, and most of the time its gym. And every once in a while we have health.” She followed up by saying that there were “not really” any other classes that were important for her to take in becoming a dentist and that she was not sure where dentists worked.

Not all girls found their current schooling irrelevant. Some indicated that what they were learning in basic courses such as math and English would help prepare them for the future. Keyanna recognized that her writing class would help her learn how to write, a necessity for psychologists, and added that she might need some basic math as well when she said, “I mean math, I know how to count, but I don’t need to know how to do graphs and stuff to be a psychologist.” Most of the girls believed that once they reach high school they would be participating in courses that directly relate to their future career goals.

Many mothers also failed to see a connection between girls’ current schooling and their specific career interest. Karen said her daughter’s current schooling may be “prepping her with the basics,” but wondered “what do you really still use that you learned in grade school or middle school? You don’t really use any of it.” Other mothers like Vivian and Amy also agreed that their daughters’ current schooling was preparing them for basic life skills but not anything that related to their daughters’ specific aspirations. For example, they thought their daughters’ math courses were preparing them to “budget” and the ability to manage their finances and perhaps their gym classes were “keeping her in shape,” but saw little connection between their girls’ current schooling and specific aspirations. While I cannot conclude that poor and working class girls are more confused about occupations than middle class girls (although they probably are, given their lesser exposure to adults with professional occupations), the consequences of their

confusion will be more severe as they have more limited exposure to various career possibilities than do middle class girls.

Even though most research suggests that young people develop their ideas mostly from families and schools, the schools that poor and working class girls in this study attended according to girls and mothers, were not doing an adequate job of helping them see a connection between their current schooling and future career goals. Moreover, mothers had difficulty themselves seeing this connection.

4.1.4 Summarizing Career Idea Influences

In this section, I showed how cultural, familial, and school milieus influence girls' career aspirations. I suggested that television plays a large role in shaping girls' ideas about the future by portraying particular jobs and the women who occupy them as glamorous and enticing. This is especially problematic for poor and working class girls who lack people in their lives in these and other professions to help them understand the realities of these jobs and the potential availability for these jobs in the labor market. I suggested that family influences girls' aspirations by teaching them an ethic of care, a work ethic, and strong hopes for economic and social mobility. Girls negotiate these often conflicting messages by wanting both college degrees and careers, often in caring fields. Finally, I showed that both the girls and their mothers see little connection between school and work perhaps because of the limited career education in schools. To illustrate the impact of these messages, I turn now to the girls' specific aspirations.

4.2 CAREER ASPIRATIONS

The twenty-two girls who participated in this study had a variety of career aspirations and the range of aspirations indicated that they were only beginning to think about what was possible for them. In this section, I present the girls' specific career aspirations. I cannot explain why girls aspire to specific jobs, or why some aspire to high or low level occupations. This is probably a result of their age, exposure to careers, and/or a combination of television, family, and school influences, as illustrated above. However, I do show how gender and class shape girls' aspirations as they aspire to jobs that require care and will enable them to "help people," are committed to gaining higher education, and desire to work.

Several wanted to be doctors, others cosmetologists, and some girls were unsure, fluctuating between very different career paths. Table 4.1 lists the girls' primary aspirations. Eight out of 22 girls (36%) aspired to occupations that require less than a Bachelor's degree, including one bi-racial girl, three of 10 white girls and three of 11 African American girls. All girls, except Kassidy, a white girl, said they wanted to go to college, probably because their families pushed education. None wanted to be homemakers like many of their mothers. In terms of gender, eleven of the girls (50%) aspired to nontraditional careers including two doctors, a pediatrician, two veterinarians, an entrepreneur, a criminal and a corporate lawyer, a pharmacist, professional basketball player and a dentist. However, the doctors, pediatrician, veterinarians, and dentist said they wanted these jobs to help people. Three other girls, who were undecided, varied between wanting a traditional and a nontraditional job including a forensic scientist/social worker, a forensic scientist/cosmetologist, and a physical therapist/actress/photographer. There were no racial differences among the girls who aspired to traditional and non-traditional careers.

Table 4-1: Girls' Aspirations and Mothers' Occupations

Name	Race	Social Class	Career Aspiration	Industry Group and Level	Level of education required	Mothers' Occupation	Industry Group and Level	Level of education required
Amber	AA	Working poor	Veterinarian	Healthcare professional	Advanced degree	Administrative assistant	Healthcare service	High school
Brittany	AA	Poor	Entertainer/ Cosmetologist	Personal service	High school & training	Homemaker	Homemaking	None
Charity	AA	Working poor	Cosmetologist	Personal service	High school & training	Cashier	Retail service	None
Danae	AA	Working class	Veterinarian	Healthcare professional	Advanced degree	Program administrator	Healthcare/ advocacy professional	Bachelor's degree
Ebony	AA	Working poor	Corporate lawyer	Legal professional	Advanced degree	Administrative assistant	Non-profit service	High school or less
Janyra	AA	Poor	Doctor	Healthcare professional	Advanced degree	Homemaker	Homemaking	None
Keyanna	AA	Working class	Psychologist	Healthcare professional	Advanced degree +	Administrative assistant	Governmental service	High school or less
Katrina	AA	Working poor	undecided	NA	Unsure	Administrative assistant	Business service	High school or less
Kyra	AA	Poor	Pediatrician	Healthcare professional	Advanced degree	Homemaker	Homemaking	None
Natasha	AA	Working class	WNBA player	Sports professional	Bachelor's degree	Food preparation	Food service	High school or less
Serena	AA	Working poor	Cosmetologist	Personal service	High school & training	Administrative assistant	Business service	High school or less
Star	Bi-R	Poor	Cosmetologist	Personal service	High school & training	Homemaker	Homemaking	None
Adriana	W	Working class	Doctor	Healthcare professional	Advanced degree	Homemaker	Homemaking	None
Alexa	W	Working poor	Criminal lawyer/ computer technician	Legal/technical professional	Advanced degree	Administrative assistant	Business service	High school or less
Amanda	W	Working class	Entrepreneur	Professional	None	Community service worker/ bartender	Food service	High school or less
Danielle	W	Working poor	Forensic scientist/ social worker	Legal/advocacy professional	Bachelor's degree +	Lab technician	Technical service	High school or less
Elaina	W	Working poor	Social Worker	Advocacy professional	Bachelor's degree +	Cashier	Retail service	High school or less
Kasey	W	Working class	Cosmetologist/ forensic scientist	Personal service / professional	High school & training/ Bachelor's degree +	Substitute teacher/waitress	Professional Education/food service	Bachelor's degree
Kassidy	W	Working class	Cosmetologist	Personal service	High school & training	Cosmetologist	Personal service	High school & training
Jessica	W	Working poor	Actress/ photographer/ physical therapist	Entertainment/ Healthcare professional	High school & training/ Bachelor's degree +	Teacher's aide	Educational service	High school or less
Randi	W	Working class	Pharmacist/ undecided	Healthcare professional	Advanced degree	Administrative assistant	Business service	High school or less
Rebecca	W	Working class	Dentist	Healthcare professional	Advanced degree	Nurse	Health service	Associate's degree

Most girls aspired to education and careers that would result in middle class income and status. Even though a notable number of them aspired to be cosmetologists, a job that would not offer middle class income or status, the same girls also aspired to go to college, an educational level that most working class families believe yields a middle class lifestyle.

Table 4.1 shows the girls' race, social class status, career aspirations, the industry group and level under which their aspirations fall, and the required educational levels for those aspirations. The table also shows mothers' occupations, the industry group and level in which the mothers' jobs fall, and the level of education required for their jobs. It is notable that 15 of 22 girls (68%) aspired to professional level jobs, most in medicine and law, and nine of these girls aspired to jobs that required an advanced college degree. Of the remaining girls, five (22%) aspired to work in service jobs (all cosmetology), one aspired to both a professional and a service occupation (again, cosmetology), and one was unsure. Seven of 11 (63%) African American girls aspired to professional levels jobs, five of which require advanced degrees, and three aspired to service level jobs that do not require a college degree (all cosmetology). Among the white girls, eight out of 10 (80%) aspired to professional occupations, four of which require an advanced degree and one that did not require a college degree but was a professional job (entrepreneur). Among the other two white girls, one aspired to both a professional and service job (cosmetology) and one aspired to a service level job that does not require a college degree (again cosmetology) and she did not want to go to college. The one bi-racial girl who participated in the study aspired to a service occupation (cosmetology) that did not require a college degree.

There was a slight difference in the aspirations of African American and white girls. First, 63% of the African American girls aspired to professional level jobs whereas 80% of the white girls did. However, more African American than white girls anticipated going into professions that require an advanced degree. Moreover, two of the African American girls aspired to service jobs wanting to be cosmetologists, as opposed to one white girl who wanted to be a cosmetologist and not attend college and one who wanted to be in both a professional position and do cosmetology, a service job, on the side.

When gradations in their social class are considered, the poor girls are divided in their aspiration levels with two aspiring to professional occupations that require a college degree and two aspiring to service jobs. The working poor and working class girls have the highest educational and occupational aspirations with six working poor girls aspiring to professional occupations, two aspiring to service positions, and one unsure. Seven working class girls aspired to professional occupations, with one aspiring to a service occupation, and one aspiring to both. Although not conclusive, these statistics indicate that as one moves up the social class ladder, educational and career aspirations increase.

Table 4.1 also lists the current occupations of mothers, the required level of education for their jobs, and the industry group and level in which they work.¹¹ Mothers were most frequently employed in administrative assistant jobs (36% of all mothers) including five of 11 African American mothers (41%) and three of the 10 white mothers (30%), none of which require a college degree. The second most frequent occupation cited by mothers was homemaker (22%) and included four African American mothers and one white mother. The other mothers had a

¹¹ Stating mothers' specific occupations could potentially link them to their daughters which could identify the girls. Therefore, I used the North American Industry Classification System, used by the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics to list broad industry categories under which mothers jobs fall.

range of jobs including two cashiers (one white and one African American mother), a teacher's aide (white), a lab technician (white), a food preparation worker (African American), and a community service worker/bartender (white), all of which are low-wage service industry occupations. Only two of the mothers had Bachelor's degrees (an African American and a white mother) and while the African American mother occupied a job for which her degree is a requirement, the white mother said she had a difficult time finding employment with her teaching degree. Regardless of educational level or occupation, all mothers' jobs were in jobs the service industry.

Race and social class are salient when comparing girls' educational aspirations and mothers' educational attainment. As the table illustrates, girls generally aspired to higher educational and occupational levels than their mothers. Twenty-one girls (95%) aspired to go to college, yet only two (9%) of their mothers had college degrees. Sixteen of the girls (73%) aspired to professional occupations, which only one of the mothers held, and another was trying to make her way into. Others aspired to service jobs, mainly cosmetology, including two African American, one bi-racial, and two white girls (although one African American girl fluctuated between cosmetology and acting and one white girl fluctuated between cosmetology and forensic science). African American girls were more likely than their white counterparts to aspire to jobs in the service industry as held by their mothers. When social class is taken into account, poor girls were more likely to aspire to service jobs like their mothers, compared to the working poor and working class girls who were more likely to aspire to professional level occupations.

Perhaps the girls aspired to (or at least, were learning to say they aspired to) higher educational levels than their mothers because poor and working class families see education as the source to a middle class lifestyle. As discussed earlier, these girls have learned aspire to

obtaining college degrees, even though their mothers (and likely many adults who surround them) have not obtained degrees themselves. These girls were clearly affected by the value of education they were learning from their families. Having a career was important to all of them and they expected a college education to offer them a better standard of living than they currently had. More importantly, most girls (except for those aspiring to be cosmetologists) aspired to careers that require Bachelor's and/or advanced college degrees, even though their mothers were not working in jobs that required education beyond high school.

It is important to note that even though these girls told me they wanted to go to college, wanted careers, and wanted a higher income than their mothers, it is possible that they are merely learning to say that they aspire to higher levels of education, occupation, and income because in their families and communities it is socially desirable to do so. As the girls age, how these verbal assertions actually connect to their emotions, motivations, and behaviors will become more clear. Moreover, in chapter five, I discuss how these girls are beginning to work toward their aspirations and suggest that their individual motivation and family and school resources are setting them on to different paths to reach their goals.

Comparing mothers' occupations with girls' aspirations also yields several significant findings. First, of the nine girls who aspired to advanced degrees, only one of their mothers had a college degree and worked in a professional occupation. All other mothers of these girls were either homemakers (three mothers) or working in administrative assistant positions (five mothers). Among the girls who aspired to jobs that require no college or Bachelor's degrees, the occupations of mothers varied. Among the five mothers who were homemakers, four were poor and African American (although one had a bi-racial daughter), one was working class and white.

Two of their daughters wanted to be cosmetologists, and three wanted to be doctors, illustrating that homemaking did not influence education and career aspirations in any significant way.

A majority of mothers (17) were in historically feminine positions including five homemakers, seven administrative assistants, a teacher/waitress, a teacher's aide, a nurse, a cosmetologist, a community service worker, and a professional healthcare advocate yet more than half of the girls aspired to non-traditional occupations including two doctors, a pediatrician, two veterinarians, an entrepreneur, a criminal and a corporate lawyer, a pharmacist, professional basketball player and a dentist and three other girls, who were undecided, but varied between wanting a traditional and a nontraditional job including a forensic scientist/social worker, a forensic scientist/cosmetologist, and an actress/photographer/physical therapist. However, many of these girls gave stereotypically feminine reasons for wanting these jobs, i.e., to care for others. The girls who aspired to traditionally feminine jobs, including four cosmetologists, a cosmetologist/entertainer, a cosmetologist/forensic scientist, a psychologist, a social worker, and a forensic scientist/social worker, had mothers who were cashiers (two), in administrative assistant jobs (two), were homemakers (two), one was a cosmetologist, and one was a teacher's aide—all traditionally feminine occupations.

For poor and working class girls, there are specific implications to having higher aspirations than their parents have obtained. First, these girls often emulated their mothers' behaviors, especially when it came to taking care of their families and staying close to their families, both factors that can be hard to negotiate when making education and career decisions. Yet at the same time their mothers, and perhaps other adults around them, pushed education. Thus girls learn to say they place a high priority on achieving in family, education, and work. While this may be the case for all girls, intergenerationally, and regardless of social class, I will

show in chapter five that the resources that poor and working class girls have to realize their goals varies in ways that set them onto different paths.

4.2.1 A Note on Cosmetology

The most frequently cited aspiration was cosmetologist, cited by six out of 22 or 27% of the girls. Two of the girls aspiring to be cosmetologists were white (20% of the white respondents), three were African American (25% of the African American respondents), and one was bi-racial (the only bi-racial girl who participated). Girls aspire to careers in cosmetology for several reasons that are related to both gender and social class. First, much of the television viewed by these girls specifically focuses on female appearance. Like other girls their age, they are bombarded by television messages about body and beauty so it is not surprising that so many aspire to be cosmetologists. Indeed, two of the girls who wanted to be cosmetologists also indicated they would like to be cosmetologists for celebrities. It is also possible that gender and social class intersect to influence these girls' interests in cosmetology. For many girls, appearance was important not only as a symbol of success, but as a means to gain power. In poor and working class cultures, appearance, including having one's hair done and nails manicured, wearing the latest fashions, and being physically attractive disguises low economic status. As Julie Bettie (2003: 92) suggests, "The body has long been the only raw material or capital with which impoverished and working class women have to work." Citing Valerie Walkerdine (1997) Bettie suggests that middle class girls believe that college and career are possibilities because they see women around them doing it, and as a result may be less drawn to jobs like cosmetology and entertainer. But for working class girls, "being looked at still presents one of the only ways in which they can escape" from the possibility of poorly paid work (Bettie,

2003: 92). Appearing to be together, i.e., having your hair done, looking nice, is a very important aspect of poor and working class girlhood. As Keyanna, an African American girl said in a focus group, “you always gotta have your hair done.” The girls in her focus group agreed that girls had to worry about having their “hair and makeup done,” and “their clothes and their body weight” and, while boys do too, “girls over-exaggerate it.” These girls talked negatively about girls who worried about looking “like people on TV,” but then talked about how much “looking good” matters. Keyanna’s reflection on appearance summarized the girls’ concerns about attractiveness. She said, “there is this dude next door and I have, I will go over there and ask him a question and I have to pick out an outfit and it will take me forever just to pick out an outfit, just to go next door to ask him a question!”

Moreover, the poor and working class girls in this study may be influenced to become cosmetologists because they can affect the way they look and the way their friends look, and they know having an attractive appearance gives them a sense of power among peers. Kasey, who was not yet decided on her career aspiration (between being a forensic scientist and a cosmetologist), said that if she became a cosmetologist she could help other people look good:

Most importantly my daughter, I could help her, I could make her look cool. Like if I had my own beauty shop, my daughter could get her nails done for free. I just thought that'd be so cool for me to like cut her hair and dye her hair different colors for her. I'd probably be a forensic scientist somewhere and then I'd come home and I'd be able to dye my kids' hair and cut their hair and do their eyebrows and stuff.

By indicating that she could provide her daughter with “free” perks of having her hair, nails, and eyebrows done and making her daughter “look cool,” Kasey illustrated not only the expense and importance of looking good, but also the power it would give her daughter among her peers.

In section 4.1, I showed how television, family, and schools influence poor and working class girls' career aspirations in gendered, classed, and racialized ways. In this section, I illustrated what the girls' aspire to be. I showed that all but one girl aspired to earn at least a four year college degree, even though only two of the mothers earned a degree. This is because poor and working class families believe that college will yield a middle class lifestyle and give message that college is a necessity. I also showed that many of the girls wanted professional level careers, also not obtained by their mothers or other adults around them. Those girls who aspired to non-traditionally feminine occupations still relied on feminine characteristics of caring for their reasons for wanting these jobs. On the other hand, I showed that six girls aspired to be cosmetologists, lower paying and lower skilled jobs than those aspired to by other girls. It is inexplicable why girls who are influenced by television, family, and schools in similar ways aspire to different levels of occupations. Perhaps it is because the girls are young and their specific aspirations are influenced by things that come along randomly in their life. The point here is that it is not so much the specific aspiration as it is how aspirations are shaped that matters. To further illustrate the girls' possible selves, or who the girls wanted to become, in the next section, I examine their familial and lifestyle aspiration are shaped in the contexts of everyday life.

4.3 FAMILY AND LIFESTYLE ASPIRATIONS

To gain a clearer picture of the girls "possible selves," I asked about their future families and lifestyles. Poor and working class girls' familial roles and responsibilities are a large part of their everyday lives and play a part in how they envision their futures. In this section, I examine

the girls' marriage and familial aspirations, the material lifestyles they wanted to have, and where they wanted to live as adults. I show how girls' familial aspirations are informed by their learned commitment to gender and class-based family and communal ideals but often conflict with their education and career goals. I also show that they aspire to modest material lifestyles, wanting to be more financially secure than their families currently are, but not, as they say, "extravagant." I also suggest that unlike white girls, African American girls have to negotiate wanting to be close to their families but wanting to move away from Pittsburgh because they are learning that discriminatory practices in the labor market can impede their success. Finally, I show that the priorities of familial ties and responsibilities learned in poor and working class families, especially among girls, often leave girls conflicted between wanting to emulate a family life like their mothers' and pursuing their individual career interests.

4.3.1 Familial Aspirations

All the girls prioritized career aspirations over having their own families and revealed interesting thoughts on the dynamics of juggling both. To understand the girls' marriage and familial aspirations, I asked them where they saw themselves at age 18, 25, and 30. When I probed for responses, I would often ask, "Will you have a husband or children at this age?" None said they wanted to have children before they finished their education. When the girls envisioned their futures at age 25 and 30, they saw work as their main priority. Securing an education and beginning their careers before having children were very important to them. It appeared that they had accepted the messages to have a career established before marriage and children so that they can support themselves. Table 4.2 highlights the girls' marital and familial aspirations.

Table 4-2: Marital and Familial Aspirations

<i>Name</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Social Class</i>	<i>Age At Marriage</i>	<i>Age for children</i>	<i>Number of Children</i>
Amber	AA	Working poor	<25	<25	1
Brittany	AA	Poor	<25	NA	0
Charity	AA	Working poor	<25	>25	1-2
Danae	AA	Working class	>25	>25	1
Ebony	AA	Working poor	>25	>25	1-2
Jamyra	AA	Poor	>25	>25	2
Keyanna	AA	Working class	<25	<25	1
Katrina	AA	Working poor	>25	>25	2
Kyra	AA	Poor	>25	>25	0-1
Natasha	AA	Working class	<25	<25	Not sure
Serena	AA	Working poor	Not sure	Not sure	Not sure
Star	Bi-R	Poor	>25	<25	1-2
Adriana	W	Working class	>25	>25	2-3
Alexa	W	Working poor	>25	>25	2
Amanda	W	Working class	<25	>25	2
Danielle	W	Working poor	<25	<25	3
Elaina	W	Working poor	>25	<25	3-4
Kasey	W	Working class	Not sure	Not sure	7
Kassidy	W	Working class	>25	>25	2
Jessica	W	Working poor	>25	>25	2
Randi	W	Working class	>25	NA	0
Rebecca	W	Working class	<25	<25	2

Most girls wanted to wait until after age 25 to be married (12 or 54%). The most frequent reason they cited for waiting was so that they could first pursue their careers. Among the girls who wanted to marry earlier than age 25 (8 or 36%), five were African American and three were white. Of the 11 African American girls interviewed, five said they wanted to be married by age 25 (45%), five (45%) said they wanted to wait until their late twenties or early thirties, and one was unsure. Conversely, only three of 10 white girls (30%) said they would like to be married by age 25, six (60%) said they would like to wait until their late twenties or early thirties, and 1 was unsure. Star, the only bi-racial girl in the study, said she wanted to be married by age 25.

In terms of social class, only one poor girl wanted to be married by age twenty-five (25%), as opposed to three who wanted to wait until after age 25 (75%). In addition, only three working poor girls (33%) wanted to marry before the age of 25, whereas five girls (55%) wanted

to wait until after age 25. One was not sure. Finally, among the working class girls, four (44%) wanted to marry before age 25 and four (44%) wanted to marry after age 25. One of the working class girls was unsure what age she wanted to marry.

The girls varied when asked if they wanted to have children and at what age, but they consistently said that “waiting” to have children was important for establishing their careers. For example, Kyra, an African American girl said that when she reaches 30, she will “probably start looking into getting married” but then wait a few more years to have children. When I asked her why she wanted to wait to have children, she replied, “cause they gonna mess up my future, my career.” There were no racial differences in the age at which the girls wanted children as three white girls and three African American girls wanted children before the age of 25, five white girls and six African American girls wanted children after the age of 25, two (1 white and 1 African American) were unsure what age they wanted children, and two (1 white and 1 African American) said they did not want children at all. However, there were racial differences in the number of children the girls expected to have. The African American girls wanted fewer children than the white girls, with their responses ranging from having no children to having two, whereas the white girls all said they wanted to have at least two children, several wanted as many as four, and one wanted at least seven. Only two girls, one white and one African American said they did not want children.

The racial differences in age at marriage and expected number of children may be a reflection of their families. The African American girls were slightly more likely to live in single parent homes (seven of 11 girls) than the white girls (four of 10 girls). They were also

more likely to have more siblings than the white girls.¹² Perhaps because many of them lived in single mother homes and saw their mothers struggle alone to make ends meet, these girls had a strong desire to be married. For example, when Keyanna, an African American girl, described her family at age 30, she saw her husband's involvement as necessary: "My husband and I will go to work, I'll be at work, I'll go get my daughter, come home, I will spend time with my daughter and by that time, her father will come home. Then we will go out, have family night, and then come home, watch some TV, then go to sleep." Similarly, Natasha, an African American girl, whose parents were married for numerous years but whose siblings had children without marriage saw getting married as important: "I want to get married. Both my oldest brother and sister did not get married...and they both have children." There could be numerous explanations of the racial differences in the girls' marriage and familial aspirations and some of these will be discussed in the next chapter. However, the common theme among all of the girls was that they wanted to have their careers intact before marriage and family.

4.3.2 Material Aspirations

Another way I gained a sense of the girls' material aspirations was by asking them where they wanted to live. Many wanted to move out of their homes after high school while others said they would stay at home and pursue their college degrees. For those who wanted to move out, living on their own when they turned 18 often was a priority. For example, Danielle said "When I turn 18, I plan on moving out and getting my own apartment and stuff. I want to be able to

¹² While I did not ask every girl how many siblings she had, I did inquire with mothers how many children they had. Although this data is limited, I did find that most African American had three or more siblings whereas, the white girls reported having two or less siblings.

financially support myself,” and Kassidy said her parents have already told her she would be moving out when she was 18. As she said her father put it, “My dad said at 18, I am out.” Not only did they want to live on their own, they also strove to be economically self sufficient. But for many, supporting themselves was not just an assertion of independence, it was a reality they came to understand by living in families that struggled financially. For example, over and over again the girls indicated that they would be paying for their own college. As Jamyra told me when I asked her what she would be doing right after high school she said, “I’ll have a job, save up for college, and probably be looking for an apartment or something.” Likewise, Danae thought she would work before attending college so that she could “have enough money for maybe a first or second year of college.” The material realities of their everyday lives were incorporated into how the girls saw their futures. As they strove to be independent, they did not envision living on their own without discipline and surveillance like middle class girls foresee, but talked about being on their own economically.

The girls talked about having their “own money” to spend and envisioned futures where they could support themselves and contribute to the family. As Kyra described, “I expect to have my own house, my own car to get me where I need to go, and my own money of course!” While most of the girls did not speak about being extremely wealthy, they did say they wanted to have money to buy what they want, travel, and have “nice things.” They seemed to have meager aspirations, or at least not as affluent as one would imagine given the media influence in their lives. It was as if they just wanted a little bit more materially than they already had. These girls were dreaming of comfort, not extravagance.

Their aspirations of comfort were also revealed when they described their sense of a typical day or when they were 25 or 30 years old, which included going to work, coming home,

and spending time with and taking care of their families. Many of them envisioned not only living with their immediate family, but having mothers and grandmothers living with them. A few said they would like to travel and indicated they wanted to “get out of Pittsburgh” when they felt like it. Others fantasized of promotions, celebrating with friends, and eventually earning enough money to own their own business.

They also aspired to have material items that provided them with comfort. They all said they wanted a “nice house” and a “nice car,” but when I probed them to describe what that would look like their responses were typically fairly modest. For example, Ebony, Danae, and Serena said they wanted homes similar to their parent’s houses. As Ebony said, “I guess kind of like my house now, cause I can’t imagine anything different.” Danae also said she wanted a “normal house” because “too much stuff makes it look like, you’re like too— you’re very, very rich and it’s not very comfortable to sit in it. It’s like ooh, I can’t relate to this stuff.” Jessica also suggested that she also wanted a “normal house,” and Kassidy said she wanted a “nice decent house” like the one in which she lived. Similarly, Kasey said she wanted “Nothing too flashy or anything – just nice,” and Rebecca said, “I don’t have to be like rich but I want to have a nice house.” While the girls indicated they wanted material things equal to or a little more than what they had, and perhaps some items were extravagant (one wanted a Mercedes Benz and closets full of clothes), most girls wanted modest homes. In fact, the most frequently expressed extravagant household item was a swimming pool. Nor did they want excessive cars. When I asked them about the cars they wanted, Natasha, Charity, and Serena, all African American girls, wanted a Hyundai “Sonata,” “just a regular Chrysler,” and a car “that runs.” Similarly, Amanda, a white girl, said she wanted a “minivan” and Jessica and Adriana, both white girls, said they

wanted “convertibles” but Adriana said, “but that's something that I think most girls my age always dream of.”

Although they had modest aspirations for their homes, a common desire was to have more space and privacy, indicating the homes in which they currently lived did not offer these. Several talked about having separate “play rooms” for their children which, as stated earlier, were currently spaces or corners of living rooms. Elaina described wanting more space when she said she wanted her future home to be “A nice house. A big house. I want something big. I don’t want something small. I hate being like, cramped. So like a big house that looks pretty on the outside and that I keep clean on the inside.” Similarly, Katrina said she wanted a house big enough to afford her family members privacy. She explained, “I want a nice house for the family. Everyone can have their own privacy.” Finally, Danae described the tight quarters in which she lived and how she wanted her own home as an adult to be different. She said,

The things I'd like to have is a girl, a house, more than two bedrooms so you can fit extra stuff in there if you ever need it or if something breaks and you can put the broken thing in here until you get rid of it, instead of keeping it down the hallway where people can trip. And what I wouldn't want, um, four kids. I wouldn't want a really, really cold attic. And, I wouldn't want really, really, cheap stuff.

While the girls’ material aspirations were modest, when they talked about space and privacy, they made it clear that they wanted more than what they currently had. When I asked Kyra what she wanted her own family to look like in the future, she replied “the same way it looks now, except for people doing bigger and better things,” underscoring the economic and material realities of poor and working class life.

4.3.3 Moving Up (and for some) Out of Pittsburgh

Another way to assess where the girls saw themselves in the future was to see where they planned to live as adults. These desires were also modest, but clearly different and often better than the neighborhoods in which they currently lived. Keyanna and Katrina wanted to live in neighborhoods that were “nice,” “quiet,” and “peaceful”. Danielle echoed their sentiments and described in more detail her idea of a nice neighborhood. She explained, “I don’t want to live in a housing plan [development] or anything but I kind of want to have the little neighborhood. Kind of like, my friend lives, it’s like a street. Just about everybody knows them. Have like a simple house.” Similarly, Elaina suggested that her current neighborhood was unpleasing, and that she wanted to live in a “better neighborhood.” She explained her future neighborhood as “One of those neighborhoods you just drive through and it’s like really peaceful and pretty.” When I asked if her neighborhood was like that she replied, “No, not really. It has a lot of old buildings and stuff like that. And I just want like all houses with pretty lawns.” Finally, Alexa was more descriptive indicating that her neighborhood was not a desirable place to live. She wanted to live in “A safe neighborhood. Like I always wanted a nice big house in a safe neighborhood. Probably like a borough so my kids could go to a private school... I think they’re safer than Pittsburgh public schools.” Alexa currently attended a public middle school and explained that her mother did not want her to attend a public high school, the same school her mother had attended. She said, “Well she went to [the same middle and high school] and she said that just now it just gotten so bad. She doesn’t want me to be around that.”

I also felt it important to ask the girls where they wanted to live, since workforce development efforts in the Pittsburgh region have been focused on confronting a “brain drain” by

keeping young, talented, and educated people from moving away.¹³ I found clear racial differences. Almost all white girls wanted to stay in Pittsburgh whereas almost all African American girls said they wanted to leave the area. While all were strongly connected to their families and pictured them being heavily involved in their future lives, what it meant to stay close to family differed by race.

I asked the girls where they wanted to live, both when they attended college and when they moved on to a career. All 10 white girls said they wanted to live close to their families, except for Amanda who wanted to move away for college, but eventually move to where her father was. Often, in an unsolicited way, these white girls would tell me why they wanted to stay in the Pittsburgh region and always, it was because they did not want to move away from their families. While most of the white girls said they would not live at home during college, they also said they did not want to go any further than a local university. Moreover, once they had secured an education and started working, they still did not want to move too far away from their families. Comments such as, “All my family lives around here and I enjoy being in contact with them,” and “I don’t want to move out of state and not be able to see them,” were common among white girls. An exchange during an interview with a girl that was interrupted by her mother gives insight as to why these girls might want to stay close to home. In this interview, I asked the daughter where she wanted to live after graduating from college, and her mother promptly replied from another room, “She wants to live at home with her mom until she is old.” The daughter responded, “Yeah I do.” The mother then said, “She used to tell me she was going to

¹³ I first learned of the Pittsburgh region’s brain drain when I worked in the workforce development field from 1997-2001. During this time, I frequently wondered why the brain drain was such a concern, or if it was even real, given that I grew up in a working class neighborhood that no one left and had many friends still living in the same neighborhoods where they were raised. I wondered if this local brain drain wasn’t just a middle class phenomenon and thought it important to ask these girls whether or not they would want to leave Pittsburgh and why.

have her husband and kids in the bedroom upstairs,” then asked her daughter for confirmation at which point the daughter agreed. The mother followed by saying, “That’s changed though. She can have her own house when she gets older” and we all laughed at the conversation. However, I remember feeling some discomfort with the interchange because I knew (probably from firsthand experience) that the importance of family in the daughter’s life could make her feel conflicted between staying close to her family and pursuing her aspirations. For this girl, having to negotiate between the importance of staying close to family and pursuing a career could be problematic. Since she wanted to be a forensic scientist, she might have to choose between staying close to family and having the career she wants. In her individual interview, the daughter confirmed that she would not move out of the area for a job. She said, “Like if my family stays in this house then I know I’ll have the safe haven of coming here, you know what I mean?”

The African American girls thought differently about moving out of the Pittsburgh area. Whether for college or career and the remainder of their lives, when I asked these girls where they wanted to live, they overwhelmingly said, “Not Pittsburgh” and suggested they would like to live in places like Atlanta, Maryland, Washington DC, North Carolina, and Massachusetts. Most said they wanted to live in other areas because they had families currently living there and they preferred the warmer weather in these places. However, understanding the local labor market and quality of life in Pittsburgh for African Americans might give insight into why these girls wanted to leave the area. A recent study conducted by the University of Pittsburgh, Center for Social and Urban Research suggests that the social and economic conditions of African Americans living in the Pittsburgh region are among “the worst in urban America” (Bangs, et. al., 2004: 5).¹⁴ While the girls did not state that the area was unfriendly both socially and

¹⁴ See chapter one for a more thorough discussion of this report.

economically to African Americans, it is likely that they wanted to move to cities larger and more diverse than Pittsburgh where there are more middle class and professional African Americans, which they probably hear about from extended family members. Adults in Kyra's life were telling her to move out of the area, for example, a staff member at her after school program said she "shouldn't stay in Pittsburgh," and "should actually go out and explore the different things."

Even though the African American girls might have been encouraged to move out of Pittsburgh, they still felt the strain of being close to immediate family, as did the white girls. They said they would have a hard time leaving their immediate families, but seeing the harsh economic and social disparities faced by adults in their lives, and hearing messages that Pittsburgh is unfriendly and less lucrative for African Americans than other places, might encourage them to leave the area, especially if they have extended family members from whom they can find support living in other more attractive cities.

4.3.4 A Life Like Their Mothers'

As much as the girls loved, respected, and admired their mothers, when I asked them if they wanted to have a life like their mother, they overwhelmingly said "no." They wanted more material possessions, they wanted to "have a life" as they often indicated their mothers do nothing besides go to work and take care of their families, and they thought their mothers' jobs were boring and monotonous. But they never wanted their mothers to hear them talk negatively about the lives they were living, which they indicated by changing their demeanor and body language during these conversations. As Amanda told me, "I just don't want to be stuck here doing this [the same job as her mother]. I just want to get out of here. It's the nicest place ever,

but you'll never get to see anything here." Then, referring to her mother's job and life, she said, "I don't want to like—I am not saying it's bad, it's just not for me." Amanda whispered her way through this conversation as if talking out loud and having her mother hear her talk negatively about her life would be admitting her mother wasn't successful. More importantly, Amanda's reluctance to have a life like her mother's illustrated how many of the girls respected, yet did not aspire to, the material lives of their mothers. As Julie Bettie (2004: 148) found in her study of girlhood, poor and working class girls "experienced some confusion and ambivalence when they realized their own desire for mobility implicitly might mean that something was wrong with who they are and their parents are now."

It is significant to note that these girls wanted to emulate their mothers in one specific way: having a close knit family, which reflected their internalization of the importance of family. But they wanted to go further than their mothers professionally. These girls differ from middle class girls who are more likely to want to emulate their mothers professionally, rather than their relationships with kin. In the middle class, girls learn to break away from their families "precisely because of the emphasis on individuality and achievement in middle class life" (MacLeod and Yates, 2007: 107). Middle class girls want to separate themselves from their mothers but draw on their support as they make career and economic decisions. Conversely, poor and working class girls want to maintain tight relationships with their mothers, who, as I will discuss later, do not have the knowledge or resources to guide their career plans. Yet, while some of these girls also expressed wanting to separate from their mothers, they did not want their mothers to know this. Instead they faced a contradiction in loving their mothers, while simultaneously recognizing their mothers' gendered and economic oppression and wanting something different for themselves.

In this section I explored marital, familial, and lifestyle aspirations to illustrate how the girls envisioned their futures. I showed how their responsibilities at home influenced their aspirations for their own adult families. I suggested that the girls aspire to modest lifestyle aspirations but want more than they currently have. I showed that while many girls envision a close knit family that lives nearby, African American girls are more likely to want to move out of Pittsburgh than white girls. Finally, I showed that girls feel conflicted between wanting to emulate their mothers' role in their close knit families and wanting to achieve more economically than their mothers. In the final section, I examine how ideals of equity inform the girls' perceptions and how girls and mothers are conflicted between wanting to believe in these ideals and knowing that structural conditions disadvantage them. While some girls and their mothers see these constructs as hindering the girls' opportunities, they accept American middle class ideals of equity and equal opportunity, believing that hard work, motivation, and personal responsibility can overcome these barriers.

4.4 IDEALS OF EQUITY

In democratic, capitalist societies, ideologies of individualism, meritocracies, and personal responsibility—or as Robert Bulman (2005) argues, middle class American ideals—mask the hierarchies and power imbalances that exist among classes, races, and other social groups. The middle class experience “has become the hegemonic cultural force in American culture... and middle class life has been defined as the social norm... and understood as the American experience” (Bulman, 2005: 31). In the United States, members of all backgrounds

take on “American cultural values” create a “predisposition to blame the victim” and morally judge those who are not economically successful (Chafel, 1997: 432). Ideologies of equality among gender, class, and racial groups permeate our culture suggesting that regardless of where one comes from or what one encounters, everyone can be what they want to be. Values of individualism and personal responsibility hide social and economic hierarchies. Discriminatory social processes and interactions are normalized by these discourses (Brantlinger, 2003).

The girls and mothers in this study adopted American ideals of individualism, meritocracy, and personal responsibility. Perhaps their views mirror those of policymakers and school administrators who assume that “Whatever Her Little Heart Desires,” girls can achieve. Indeed, when I discussed definitions of success and what it takes to be successful with girls and mothers, their most common responses included ideals of hard work, motivation, a positive attitude, and a strong work ethic. In this section, I discuss how girls and mothers see gender, class, and race as helping or hindering them in reaching their goals. I argue that even when some girls and their mothers see these constructs as hindering the girls’ opportunities, they accept American middle class ideals of equality and equal opportunity, believing that hard work, motivation, and personal responsibility can overcome these inequities.

4.4.1 Meanings of Success and Failure

In the focus groups, much of the conversation centered on the girls’ definitions of success. When I asked the girls what it meant to be successful, the general response was that to be successful, one only has to achieve the goals they have established for themselves usually by “setting a goal and then going out there and getting it.” Success, as defined by the girls, included “having a good job, getting an education, and paying your bills.” Similarly, definitions of being

rich included “having a lot of money,” “living in a mansion,” and “buying things that just don’t make no sense.” The girls had negative feelings toward the rich, suggesting they have a tendency to act “ignorant towards people” because they are “enthusiastic” and “...excited. Like they’re proud about what they do.” At the same time, in all focus groups, the girls concluded that having money makes one happy, but one can be successful without having money. They reinforced these ideas by talking about people they knew that did not have a lot of money but were successful, including family members who finished high school and earned college degrees, people who had jobs and cars, and even a mother who had her children taken away from her, but was able to get them back. They concluded that “anyone can be successful” and having a lot of money does not define success.

Conversely, when I asked girls to talk about failure and being poor, they seemed to articulate a clearer understanding of what these characteristics looked like, as opposed to the more general statements about success. For example, when I asked them to describe someone who is not successful, they replied, “living off of your parents,” “not having your own things,” “having no steady job,” “can’t pay your bills,” “can’t support your kids,” “have to live paycheck to paycheck,” and “you have to measure every amount of money you have.” The girls used people they heard about, knew, and relatives to describe people who they deemed unsuccessful as one girl said, “They will just start losing track of their bills and stuff. And then they’ll just get real frustrated and give up and then they will get evicted. They will get a 25 day shut off; I mean a 10 day shut off notice about the light bill, the electricity bill or something like that.” They also suggested that poor people “give up” and turn to drugs and homelessness. As one girl said, “You become poor from being a crackhead. You become poor because you give up all your stuff to get crack.”

The girls did not see themselves or their families as poor, because they spoke of being poor as what happened to other people. Their descriptions of poor people included those who did not have enough money to “do things that are fun,” as “not being able to have what everybody else has on their feet or what everybody else is wearing like all their jewelry,” and as poor people who “live on the street and beg for money.” One girl described her encounter with a homeless person who approached her on the street and asked her for money. She said, “He was like ‘Gimme a dollar, gimme a dollar, gimme a dollar.’” She described her reaction as one of shock and discontent when she said, “I was like, what is wrong with you?” When I asked if she or her friends gave him money, she said “NO!” and told me she suggested to him that he needed to get a job and said, “I got to go make my money.”

In sum, the girls suggested that they could be successful if they obtained an education and a good job that enabled them to pay their bills and they knew people who achieved this definition of success. Moreover, they concluded that money does not buy happiness and that rich people are arrogant and spend their money in frivolous ways and implied one does not have to be rich to be successful. They also knew people who did not achieve their definition of success, i.e., people who may have struggled with paying their bills, but they were quick to remove themselves from potential “bad futures” by suggesting that drug addiction, hopelessness, and homelessness, happened to others.

The girls believed that they would have good futures because hard work, determination, and motivation were the keys to success. In their words, failure happened to people who had an “I don’t care about anything kind of attitude,” who are “destructive and do things that are just aren’t good,” “do not work hard and slack off,” or are “worried about going out to the club, drinking, smoking weed. They don’t even think right in their life.” They touted themselves as

people who possessed the right qualities to reach their goals. As Amanda said, “Well I know it sounds conceited and rude but I think I have a higher of a chance [of reaching her goals] because I actually care. I know a lot of people my age who just don't care and I know they're not going to get anywhere because they don't try, they don't do anything.” Similarly, Keyanna said it would not be hard for her to reach her goals “because of my whole attitude. If I want something bad enough I am going to do whatever I got to do to get it, period.” These girls did not see failure as a possibility.

The girls also mentioned other factors that contribute to success or failure, including luck, (“you could win the lottery”) or family support (“their parents just don't care”). When asked about obstacles to attaining goals, they mentioned fate, like Kasey who said that only “major accidents” or “a tragic loss in the family” could prevent her from reaching her goals. Similarly, focus group participants replied that “your house could burn down” as what would prevent someone from reaching their goals. Interestingly, they (especially white girls) treated pregnancy as a matter of fate that just happened but would not happen to them. When I asked Kasey if there was anything that could happen to a girl her age to prevent her from reaching her goals she said, “Well they could become pregnant and that would suck. That would never happen to me, ever. I can tell you now.” Similarly, in a focus group in which one of the girls was pregnant, a participant said, “This is no pun intended [looking at the pregnant girl], but getting pregnant at a young age, you know, I mean people handle it differently. Some people, it will ruin their lives.”

Girls are inundated with ideals of success through media and people around them (Gilligan, 1992). As discussed earlier, these ideals are epitomized in *Girl Power* rhetoric which apply to all girls, regardless of social class or race. In discussing their ideas of success, the African American girls in this study were more likely than the white girls to cite the biographies

of successful African American women who were born into very modest backgrounds. For example, in a focus group, three African American girls discussed in detail the careers of Oprah Winfrey and pop artists Beyonce` Knowles, Keyshia Cole, and Fantasia Barrino, to illustrate their ideas of success. One African American girl, discussing Oprah, said, “I think she is *very* successful ‘cause she was poor, she didn’t have a pair of shoes until what age, like seven or eight. Yeah I think she is very successful and now that she achieved her goals, she is helping others achieve theirs.” The same girls described Beyonce` as having to “work hard” and “practice” to reach her stardom. Fantasia Barrino, winner of *American Idol* and now a well known pop star, had her life story made into a movie which aired on the *Lifetime* television network. Several African American girls talked about this film which featured Fantasia growing up poor, sexually assaulted as a teen, made fun of by other girls, and involved with an abusive boyfriend. Fantasia’s story of “rags to riches” clearly resonated with these girls. They drew from it to show that motivation and hard work are what it takes for a poor African American girl to make it in American society.

In addition to the media, they learned an “If you if you believe it, you can achieve it” attitude (as articulated by Serena) from their mothers, who teach them to have a “good attitude,” stay focused, and make the right decisions. Cheri, a mother who told her children to go to school with a positive attitude, said “That’s what I tell my children... a lot of teachers nowadays, if you’re not coming in there [to school] willing to learn then they will just leave you behind... so for children that have any kind of attitude problems, you know or any kind of behavior problems, they’re definitely lost in the back.” Kira also taught her daughter that a positive attitude and hard work would help her overcome obstacles and reach her goals. She told her daughter, “Ain’t nobody gonna give you anything. It ain’t gonna fall in your lap either. You gotta go get it, you

have to fight for what you want, especially today, you have to fight for what you want and don't give up and don't get discouraged cause you can." Beth also believed that teaching her daughter to have a positive attitude would help her reach her goals. She believed the people who are most likely to reach their goals are "the ones with drive...and values... and self respect," as did Karen who told her daughter that "keeping up" with her grades is "the only way that you're going to get any where in life."

Mothers taught their girls to stay focused by suggesting that they were responsible for their own fate. Leslie felt her daughter played "the biggest role [in her life] because she has her mind set on things." Sylvia also said her daughter's fate is in her own hands by suggesting, "If she does have a barrier it would probably be just giving up, so concentrating on what she gotta do," is necessary for her to reach her goals. Finally, Barb suggested that it is up to her daughter to make the right choices in life so that she can reach her goals. She said, "She knows that while everything will work out if you have patience and tolerance, if you make choices that make it hard for you when you're young, then it's harder, life is harder. So I think she'll be wise in making her choices." As girls and mothers adopt ideals of hard work, motivation, having a positive attitude, and staying focused rather than critically assessing their structural impediments to success, they are internalizing the individualistic ideals that are customary in American society (Lareau, 2003). Individuals learn to accept that social rewards such as status and privilege are earned from individual "intelligence, talent, and effort" (Lareau, 2003: 275).

In her book, *Getting by on the Minimum*, Jennifer Johnson (2002) asserts that when asked to give reasons for dropping out of school, people rarely cite the causes sociologists believe important such as the organization of the school or a family's social class. Instead, they rely on individualized explanations of failure, i.e., "they say they dropped out because they didn't like

school or because they were pregnant” (Johnson, 2002: 187). Citing Karl Marx and Max Weber, Johnson argues that social class works “behind our backs” to obscure choice. Women in her study saw their actions as personal responsibility and ignored the structural influences on their behavior. In my study, neither the girls nor their mothers attributed success or failure to structural conditions. Like Johnson’s women, they were “unconscious” of class and instead saw individual action and fate as explaining the economic and social circumstances in which they live (Johnson, 2002).

Girls and mothers were not completely oblivious to the ways that gender, class, and race could impact their futures. In fact, many of the mothers knew first hand that these could be a barrier in education and the labor market. They understood how gender, class, and race influenced power. However, they still believed that hard work, motivation, and meritocracy could overcome most barriers they might face. I now discuss how gender, social class, and race related barriers were experienced and understood by girls and mothers.

4.4.1.1 The Realities of Gender

When I asked girls to discuss if and how gender matters for one’s future, they offered a variety of responses. The girls’ ideas about gender were similar to their mothers’ in that some believed that gender would not prevent them from reaching goals, whereas others believed that it could. Four girls, two white and two African American, believed that gender did not matter in reaching one’s goals. Even when I probed, they reiterated that “everything is equal.” Danae thought it odd that I asked her if boys and girls had equal opportunity in reaching their goals. She replied, “Yeah why wouldn’t I? Because we may be different genders but we have the same kind of mind.”

Only a few girls believed that their gender would be a barrier to reaching their goals. For example, when I asked Randi if she thought boys and girls should be differentially concerned about their futures she said, “I guess girls probably have to work harder than guys do.” When I asked her why, she said, “Because they’ve [boys] been working in the work force longer than girls,” implying that women are at a disadvantage compared to men because they are not as experienced as men. Ebony, an African American girl, also believed that being a girl might limit her chance to grow up and become what she wanted. When I asked her to explain, she drew upon her gender and race and said, “Because boys, I think, I don’t know, it just seems like boys get jobs easier or something. ‘Cause when I think business or something, I just think of a man in a suit or something. I don’t immediately think of a girl. And being African American I don’t think you’re given as many chances.” While Ebony was sure that gender and race could present barriers to achieving one’s goals, the responses of most girls were uncertain and contradictory and did not include analyses of these barriers.

Uncertainty was revealed in a focus group when several girls expressed a mix of traditional and contemporary gender views. One girl insisted that girls did not have the same opportunities as boys and suggested that employers discriminated against women because in society “people seem to think a man can do more than a woman.” Her peers quickly disagreed. However, when I began to question whether specific careers should be reserved for one gender, such as a nurse, doctor, cosmetologist, construction worker, or plumber, they all agreed that certain jobs were more gender appropriate. They did not “understand why men gotta be nurses, why can’t they just be doctors,” and did not think women would do as good a job as men as doctors, specifically surgeons, because women “*are* emotional.” Moreover, they believed that “the woman is better off just handing them [the male doctor] the stuff, like they could be in the

room but just like handing them the scalpel” because women would become too upset and emotionally unable to handle surgery. They also disagreed that men could be cosmetologists because, “I was brought up to believe that if a male is in a salon, braiding your hair, spraying your hair, that he is gay,” and they did not think that women could be construction workers because it required strength that men were more likely to have. Finally, they disagreed that women could be plumbers because “females don’t really like to get dirty for real,” and one “get[s] sick when I look at the toilet.” These girls believed in equal opportunities for women and men in education and the labor force, but also believed in gender appropriate careers.

Danielle contradicted herself in an interview by first stating that girls and boys have equal opportunities in reaching their goals, then, drawing on what she observed, presumably in the media, she said,

‘Cause I think now in like today’s world, because you even see like Nancy Pelosi is the speaker of the house now. Which is the first. So like especially like in my point in time, getting into the work field and stuff, it seems like its pretty equal. I mean there’s some discrimination. I mean, like some guys will be like, you know [making a disgruntled face], but as a whole I don’t think it would be too hard.

She referred to her mother who was in a non-traditional job as an example of a woman who doesn’t face problems based on her gender because she “likes being around guys.” She added, “I think that’s another... like, girls need to overcome the stumbling block of feeling weird in a guys’ work field. Construction may be more guys than girls. So if the girl really wants to do that, it’s kind of up to her to be able to overcome over that.” At first Danielle indicated that gender is not a problem in reaching one’s goals. Then she suggested it could be. Then she said it is not. She concluded by suggesting that if being a woman presents barriers in one’s career options, then it was women themselves who had to overcome those barriers.

An interesting conversation I had about gender was with Adriana who said, “it depends on the college” when I asked her if boys or girls had more educational opportunities. She clarified by stating, “Certain colleges are more targeted towards boys and it would also depend on what major I wanted. Like if I wanted to play professional football and go to college for football, I know, you just can't do that but on a football scholarship, I know a boy would have a lot better chance than I would.” When I asked if some colleges prefer to pick boys instead of girls regardless of major, she said, “I don't know because the way America's been set up. Before, women couldn't even really go to college and now it's kind of like progressed so that we can. But they still, they are more targeted toward men and stuff. I feel that's how the entire planet is though in society.” I found Adriana's social critique interesting so I asked if only athletes confronted gender discrimination or did other workers. She aspired to be a doctor and replied that she has “heard” that “people automatically assume that the doctor is a man instead of a woman because of how our society has been set up in the past and stuff.” I asked her if that was something she learned in school and she said, “No. I know in history women mainly stayed at home, washed clothes, and cooked dinner and men went out hunting or whatever the job. And even like in the fifties and stuff, women stayed at home, cooked, and cleaned and it's only fifty years later and I don't think we've made that big of a step yet.” However, when I asked her specifically if her gender would present a difficulty in reaching her aspirations, she replied, “America is still more male dominant than female dominant but for the most part it's fairly equal. As long as you have the ability, I think for the most part you'll be able to get what you want.”

While most girls offered contradictory insights when explaining gender equity in the workplace, a few girls believed that being a girl was an advantage because girls were more motivated than boys. Interestingly, only one white girl suggested that girls had an advantage

over boys in reaching their goals, compared to one bi-racial girl and two African American girls. This is notable, given, as I will show, more African American than white mothers also thought girls were more motivated and had better opportunities than boys.

Amanda, a white girl, laughed when she said, “I know like for example my grades, percentage wise, boys are stupider. Like, they don't care as much.” She cited her advanced placement courses as examples of how girls achieve more than boys. “There's two boys in my Advanced class, whatever that tells you” as compared to fifteen or twenty girls. Star, a bi-racial girl, also thought it was easier for girls to achieve because boys are worried about “Getting girls pregnant. Not going to school. Dropping out. Selling weed. Being dope boys.” She implied that boys put themselves at a disadvantage because they involve themselves in illegal activity and argued, “You ain't got to be a dope boy to have money... Flipping burgers ain't that hard.” Similarly, Amber and Katrina, both African American girls, believed that girls are more advantaged than boys because they are more persistent. As Amber said, “Once they [boys] get toward high school they want to quit so fast and girls they try to stick to it. So they can get to college, try to get a job. That's why you see all them homeless men on the street. You see crack heads mostly, and they are men.” While all girls believed that boys did not work as hard as girls, the bi-racial and African American girls illustrated by associating unsuccessful boys with homelessness, drug use, and other social problems that plague poor and African American communities.

As was the case for their girls, mothers had contradictory feelings about gender. Leslie, a white mother, suggested that there are “no limitations” for her daughter based on gender. While she disclaimed, “I am not a feminist whatsoever, I am not for all these equal rights,” she explained that “everything should be equal. You get what you deserve.” She did not believe

jobs should be “set aside for women,” but “if the woman deserves the job she should get it, if the man deserves the job then by all means he should get it.” Furthermore, she believed that her daughters have seen plenty of women “running things” in their lives. Thus, she concluded there are no obstacles to her daughter based on gender. Mary, an African American mother, also believed her daughter would not be hindered in her career because “it’s an equal opportunity.” She acknowledged that in the past, women were not offered the same rights as men but today: “We have our equal rights now too.” Moreover, like many other mothers, she drew upon physical characteristics when examining her own position on gender equality in the workplace. She said, “Women do construction and PENNDot [Pennsylvania Department of Transportation] road work and all that too. Getting up on the telephone poles and climbing... it just depends on how your body structure is. And what your mind is structured out to do.”

While some mothers responded quite quickly that women and men have equal opportunities in the workforce, a little bit of probing revealed clear contradictions in their responses. For example, Cheri, an African American mother, first said that some women can do any job but “all that heavy construction work, that’s a man’s job. Working in different factories with heavy machinery, to me, that’s a man’s job.” When I asked her if some jobs should be reserved for women she said, “I mean, working in a hospital, a secretary, but then there are men that are secretaries too you know.” When I asked her if her daughter’s gender will matter in her future, she said, “She could do any thing that she wants to, you know, except for the construction stuff.” While on one hand Cheri clearly suggested there are certain jobs for men and women, she also asserted that her daughter can “do anything she wants.”

A couple of mothers had experienced gender inequality in their workplaces but still asserted that their girls can be anything they want to be. Both white mothers, Beth and Tina’s

views of gender equality were inconsistent in this way. Beth said, “I tell them [her children], you can do anything you want, as long as you’re capable of doing it.” However, Beth admitted to questioning her children on the gender appropriateness of certain jobs saying she asked her daughter, “Would you want to be a heavy equipment operator?,” and warned her of the conditions of the job for women. She said, “You know I says, maybe you’re not lifting anything heavy, you may or may not, but look what you’d have to wear. You don’t want to wear a hard hat everyday. Do you want to wear glasses everyday? Keep in mind when you get a job, you’re going to be there everyday. If you don’t like what you’re wearing.” Beth said that gender doesn’t prevent people from obtaining jobs, but implied that girls should base their aspirations on the attire required for a job. She told her daughter that having to dress in traditionally masculine attire should be considered before she pursues a career in a male dominated occupation. Similarly, while Tina believed that “it’s all equal. If you could do the job, it’s yours,” she later suggested that “Men will always get a little more” in the workforce. However, she reiterated that gender should not be a barrier to women who should only need to work hard enough to reap the same benefits as men.

Underlying the mothers’ arguments were clear biological rationales since they drew on the characteristics of manual/blue collar labor to explain why certain jobs were for men and not women. Moreover, some mothers adhered to ideas of hard work and motivation by suggesting that their daughters could be anything they wanted and even overcome physical barriers, “as long as she can do the job,” “as long as she is physically capable,” and “it’s her choice.” Barb, a white mother, and I had a very long, in-depth conversation about gender difference and equality. At first when I asked her if girls had to worry about anything that boys did not when thinking about their futures, she replied, “Most girls have that maternal, you know, that ‘to be a mom

thing' going on. I don't care who you are, women always have that inside of them and they have to think about, okay, what choices do I make?" She went on to explain that women, who choose a career over family, may regret their choices whereas men do not have to make those choices. Frustrated, she said, "but women are expected to wear like seven hats." However, when I asked her if she thinks that girls know they will have to make these choices as adults, she replied, "I don't think society puts any focus on that. Society, I think, tries to de-sex our kids and make them feel that you're the same no matter what and they certainly are not. Men are made a way, women are made a way, and they have different strengths and differences." She continued to illustrate her discontent by saying that society teaches girls "Don't worry about your womanly things, and I think some of our girls miss the boat on that." To illustrate, she cited her cousin, whose focus on schooling and work contributed to her inability to get pregnant and, she believed, led to a divorce. Moreover, she argued, "We rip our girls off when we stress that having a career is important because the girls miss out on the mom things and the real, the women things that you are made to be, you know. So you got to have a balance."

At the same time, Barb did not believe that gender should preclude girls and boys from certain careers. She went into great detail to explain that she does manual labor for her husband's small business and said she is astounded at people's surprise when they find out a woman is coming to their homes to do work on their "septic system." She concluded, "So yeah, women can do things that require physical strength and men can do nurturing jobs. But we do have to always remember that there are things that men and women are more suited for." While Beth, a white mother, recognized that "Women still are underpaid compared to their male counterparts – that's just a fact," she also said that "Men are also supposed to be the head of the household and the breadwinner." She concluded this part of our conversation by saying, "I

would have never burned my bra.” While Beth seemed both aware and angered by the barriers women face in the workplace, including juggling work and family, having their choices and options constrained because of gender, and a gender wage gap, she resorted to traditional, biological gender ideals to explain these problems. Moreover, she accepted and justified gender inequality as “the way it is.” These traditional ideas reflect mothers’ gendered and classed upbringing and current positions. They were raised in families in which men did manual work and currently have husbands, boyfriends, and brothers who do physical labor.

The most interesting conversations I had with mothers about gender in the workforce were with those who believed that girls may have advantages over boys in reaching their goals. These sentiments were especially expressed by African American mothers. While Vivian, an African American mother, believed that girls and boys have the same opportunities in society, she also felt that “Girls are stronger than the boys. I mean, we are doing more things than the boys is doing so it’s reversed.” Similarly, Shakira, an African American mother, believed that women have more to worry about than men because they have the responsibility of taking care of children. She believed that as young people set their goals, girls have to worry about taking care of children but for boys, “even if they have a baby, it’s not going to matter.” However, she believed that African American men had more difficulty obtaining jobs than African American women. She said, “I’m not sure what the reason is. I’m not sure if it’s because of acculturation, how they’re brought up. I think the females in the Black culture are expected to do certain things and the males they just pretty much don’t think they’re going to do anything.” While Shakira recognized that family may constrain the future choices of young African American girls, she also indicated that African American boys will have less opportunity in the labor force than their female counterparts. Here Shakira illustrated how gender and race intersect to produce varying

levels of equality for girls and boys as they plan their futures. Many girls and mothers however, discussed social class and race more as a single identities rather than as intersecting with one another or gender, as shown below.

4.4.1.2 The Realities of Social Class

Several girls mentioned that their family's lack of money could be a barrier to their success, but also asserted that hard work and motivation could overcome these constraints. For example, Danielle believed the biggest barrier to her becoming a forensic scientist was that she was "not a very dedicated person. Like if something gets like too hard, I kind of back up out of it." She then mentioned that she found that the schooling for this occupation would take 10 years to complete "and I don't have the kind of money to actually go and do that. So that would be something that I would, that could stop me from doing that." While Danielle wondered how she would pay for schooling, she primarily believed it would be her lack of dedication that could prevent her from reaching her goals. She demonstrated this in a focus group as well when she said it would be hard for "some people" to reach their goals because it "takes determination, you have to want it, and it's an uphill battle." When I asked her what she meant by "battle" she mentioned "financial issues" briefly, but her focus quickly returned to dedication. She said, "Financial issues you know, just different, maybe emotional, 'cause once you're under a lot of stress, worried about a lot of things, it's, you know, schooling is hard too. You know tests and everything. It's difficult." Danielle illustrated how even though many girls recognized and named economic barriers, they were quick to cite motivation and a positive attitude as more important factors for reaching one's goals.

African American girls were much more critical than white girls of the ways in which financial barriers could impact one's success. They also understood that class and race intersect

to create more difficulties for African Americans to reach their goals. In a focus group with African American girls, when I asked why people are poor, one girl said it was because “they did not get a good education or a good job.” Another girl followed with recognition that it took money to achieve these things. She said, “I think it’s also partly just like, the world we live in. If you don’t get raised in a wealthy family, then sometimes it’s hard to dig yourself out of that hole because you can’t maybe afford a good education so it links into that too. So if you can’t afford to get the good education to get the good job, you may be stuck being poor.” However, the first girl disagreed and argued that one’s attitude is still the determining factor for success. She followed by saying, “If people don’t really get a good education, like you don’t care about school or anything, you will never have a chance.” Rather than acknowledging that the more money one has, the better their education they receive, this girl believed that attitude could overcome these barriers. This friendly disagreement went on between the girls for much of the focus group until Keyanna, the most critical and dominant participant, convinced the others to look at the education and labor force system from a more critical stance. During this conversation, she asserted that people were poor because of “the government.” When I asked her how the government makes people poor, she said,

It’s kinda like the government, I guess you can classify it as like rich people and poor people, he [the President] is kinda on the rich people’s side and the government tries to make it seem like, I mean they give back a little bit with welfare and stuff but everybody knows that giving people money is not helping them reach anything. I think there is more the government can do but I really don’t think the government cares because those people are rich. So what does it matter?

Later in the focus group, another participant remarked that she believed all people have the same chance to grow up and reach their goals as long as they had a positive attitude, but Keyanna continued to debate her on this. She said,

Obviously if you are poor to start off with, you'll have to work harder than someone who is maybe not higher class but middle class. I think if you are at the bottom working your way to the top you would have to work harder than the person that is above you. I think that white people have a better chance than Black people, and probably Hispanic people.

When I asked Keyanna why she thought white people had a better chance in reaching their goals, she said that she learned in her world cultures class that “back in the day everybody always wanted to be a white man because the white person was always the richest,” and that women and minorities were unable to prosper because they were discriminated against. But she still believed that today “white people got a better chance because the richest people is white people.” Unsure of herself, she then retracted that statement and mentioned the success of Oprah Winfrey, but then said, “but usually the richest people are white people.”

The girls' conflicted ideas about whether or not having money determined success were quite similar to their mothers who experienced economic disparities, but believed that hard work and motivation could overcome these barriers. Most of the mothers acknowledged that the lack of money would make it difficult to send their daughters to college, as Leslie explained, “We live paycheck to paycheck, I mean by all means, we are not, we would not be able to take on college tuition right now. I know that for a fact.” Other mothers echoed Leslie's statements, saying such things as “I can't put her through college,” “I'm not going to be the kind of mother that can pay for their college,” “it [paying for college] would be rough for us,” and they were hoping to have “at least have enough money to pay for at least a semester or so... but by the time she gets there it probably won't be enough to pay for a book.” Yet, at the same time, these mothers frequently suggested that all young people have the same chance to reach their goals. As Leslie said, “I don't think it matters if you are in the ghetto or you are living on in Bethel Park [a middle class neighborhood]. I don't think it matters moneywise, I just think it's what they want.” She went

on to explain that while people from disadvantaged backgrounds may have to work harder, there are also privileged people from middle class neighborhoods who disregard opportunities. She concluded, “I mean, the opportunity is out there.” Leslie implied that opportunities are equally available to people regardless of social class and individuals have to take advantage of opportunities.

Rather than drawing on American ideals, other mothers evoked personal experiences to suggest that individuals needed to take personal responsibility over their own futures. Beth went into much detail to explain how even though it may be difficult for individuals who come from modest financial backgrounds to reach their goals, she “made it,” and while her daughters may have to struggle, they have learned from her work ethic that they can reach their goals. After years of struggling to make ends meet, Beth at the age of 32, went to nursing school. Soon after she began, she became pregnant. Already raising one child, she recalled how difficult it was for she and her husband to make ends meet, but she persisted in earning her degree. She said, “I had my books propped up on a microwave and I’d be cooking dinner, holding her, breast feeding. And it was not easy. So it’s like when I see people that want to sit on welfare, I get really upset because I did it. It was either that or starve.” While she said she relied on “food stamps” and her husband’s job to “to put us through,” she also suggested that she took the responsibility to do “whatever it took.” Beth also acknowledged that not all young people have an equal chance to achieve their goals because, in her case, she too “started out really poor,” but went to nursing school, “made something of myself,” and now her daughter will not have to struggle the way she did. So even though Beth admitted that it was difficult to reach her own goals and that young people whose families have limited economic resources may have a more difficult time than

those with economic resources, she cited herself as an example of how hard work and determination can prevail against the odds.

Even though mothers drew on ideals of personal responsibility and motivation, they predicted that they would face financial barriers in helping their daughters reach their goals. However, white mothers were much more hopeful about overcoming these barriers than African American mothers because they believed that their extended family, combined with student loans would help. For example, every time a white mother admitted possibly facing financial barriers, she quickly followed with statements like, “but we would figure something out” to help her daughter reach their goals. When I asked mothers to clarify, they said they could rely upon their own parents and wealthy/better off siblings to pitch in economically to pay for their daughters’ educations. Even more, white mothers mentioned, quite matter-of-factly, that student loans could help their daughters reach their goals. For example, Tina said, “Oh there's always loans. There's always something. There's my parents, there's, you know, me, her dad, there's [mom's boyfriend] – he's always helpful. I would do anything I could to make sure she got the education that she wanted and needed.” Similarly, Julie and Tina admitted they would have difficulty paying for their daughters’ education but assumed they would rely on loans. Julie said, “If she was going to college and got turned down for a loan, which I don't think that you get turned down for loans, we would take one out for her,” implying that she could overcome any financial hardship that would prevent her daughter from going to college, and Tina said, “With all the loans and stuff, student loans and stuff, I don't think she'd have a problem.”

African American mothers made little mention of these resources. They were more likely to see economic position as a barrier that could not be overcome. For example, when I asked

Anita if her family could have financial difficulty in helping her daughter reach her goals she said,

When we first moved here, I wasn't working. It was a choice between a bill and school clothes. Um, are you ever supposed worry about that? You're supposed to worry about not getting Christmas because I'm not working? We faced that. It was real hard because I can't get you anything, but I'm hoping that we have a roof up over our head. I don't think she really understood that. But it did happen just that way. I couldn't do anything. You know.

I asked if money could be a barrier to putting her through college and she replied, "Exactly." Cheri was a little more optimistic when I asked her if paying for college could be a barrier, as she understood that saving money for her daughters' college could help her reach her goals. She said, "It would be rough for us but, I think we would do it... I would have to save. I haven't saved no money up for her for college and I said I wanted to start." She continued by describing a financial program at her job that contributes or possibly matches money parents put into a savings account. However, Cheri said that her income does not afford her the opportunity to take advantage of this program.

Both girls and mothers understood that economic barriers could inhibit them from reaching their goals. However, they believed that hard work and motivation could overcome these constraints. White mothers believed they could rely on extended family members and financial institutions to supplement their economic needs while African American mothers were less optimistic about these resources. As I will show in the next section, race was also a factor that girls and mothers negotiated as they planned for the future.

4.4.1.3 The Realities of Race

While the girls and mothers varied about whether gender and social class mattered in reaching their goals, when I asked how race would factor into their futures, they tended to have

more straightforward responses, either that it would matter completely or that it did not matter at all. For example, of the 10 African American girls who responded to the question, “Do you think all young people have the same chance in reaching their goal, regardless of race?,” four responded that African American youth had equal opportunity with whites and six insisted they did not. Similarly, of the nine white girls who responded to the same question, four said race would not factor into one’s opportunities whereas five said they would have a better chance because they are white. On the other hand, all of the African American mothers shared racist experiences they and their daughters encountered but, interestingly, only two of seven said that they talked candidly with their daughters about the ways race can impact their futures. Of the white mothers who discussed racial barriers with me, about half recognized barriers to being African American, whereas the other half indicated concern that their own daughters could be discriminated against because they are white.

The African American girls who believed that all people have an equal chance in reaching their goals offered very brief, matter-of-fact responses, but the girls who believed the opportunities were not equal had detailed explanations. For example, when I asked Danae if she thought she had the same chance as all young people in reaching her goals regardless of race, she replied, “Of course,” and similarly, Katrina said, “Uh huh.” However, when I asked Brittany the same question, she replied, “Cause sometimes the people that pick people’s jobs, they’ll pick a white person over a Black person,” suggesting that employers practice hiring discrimination. When I asked her if she knew someone who encountered race discrimination and how she knew that, she replied, “I just know that.” Keyanna also said that race would matter in reaching one’s goals. She said she would have “less chance than white people but a greater chance than I don’t even know, like, maybe a Mexican.” When I asked her why, she said, “Because I just go by like

what I read or what I hear. A lot of it's just like the minority thing, like especially what I am doing like in world cultures. We talk about the minority and the government and a white person is more likely to be chosen to be a president over a Black person or Asian, it's just stuff like that, so I just go by that." I asked Keyanna what these issues made her think about for her own future and she replied, "I really don't be thinking about it for real. Like I really don't think about it." Finally, Amber offered the most critical response when I asked if people had the same chances regardless of race. She said, "They [white people] might have a better chance of accomplishing their goals. They mostly always have a better chance." When I asked her why she felt that way, she replied, "Because you see more white people than Black people that have accomplished things. Not in a mean way though," indicating a difficulty in talking with me about racial inequality. I followed up by asking her if she thought it unfair that white people have better opportunities than people of color. Our conversation reflects her critical position on how race works in one's education and career:

I don't think its fair, because they try to put pressure on people so much. And certain people, they don't pressure, they just help them out so they can try to accomplish their goal.

[Who's they?]

Oh, people that have helped you, around your neighborhood or people at your job or whatever.

[And they help white people more, or Black people?]

I think white people already know what to do.

[Uh huh, and Black people need help?]

Yeah, because they decide what they want to do and when they do it, then they lose the focus.

Amber suggested that white people were more likely to be pushed to reach their goals by others in their lives whereas African Americans had less of a chance in reaching their goals because they lacked social support. However, Amber's comment that "white people already know what to do" indicated a systemic injustice where whites did not need the same kind of support as

African Americans in education and career systems because they already have advantages. Interestingly, though, Amber ultimately decided that African Americans might be able to accomplish their goals if they worked hard, stayed motivated, and did not “lose the focus.” Perhaps Amber’s familiarity with discrimination is like Natasha’s who indicated a personal encounter with systemic discrimination with her guidance counselor at school. Natasha said she would not ask her guidance counselor for help because “she is prejudice.” Natasha indicated she would listen to her guidance counselor if she gave her a directive like “you need to get into your classroom,” but “wouldn’t take her advice,” and would not “go sit down there and talk to her” to ask her questions about her future. But later, when I ask Natasha if she thought all young people have the same opportunities to reach their goals, she said, “Yeah!”

When I asked the white girls if they thought all young people have the same opportunities in reaching their goals regardless of race, they responded quite similarly to the African American girls. Four of the white girls indicated race did not matter, whereas five suggested that it did. For the girls who said race did not matter, the responses of African American and white girls were similar. Jessica said, “yeah” all young people have equal opportunities, Cassidy said, “I think it’s equal;” Rebecca said, “I think it is the same chance as anybody;” and Randi said, “I don’t think it would matter.” The girls who believed that race made a difference most often suggested that employers instituted discriminatory practices when hiring. For example, Alexa thought that employers wrongfully practiced discrimination in hiring:

If someone owns their own business and like a Spanish person came in and they thought that someone would hurt them, they wouldn’t let them work for them because they thought they weren’t reliable... if people would give people chances and let them show you that they can do something, then people would have the same chance. But people just don’t give people chances.

Like Alexa, Danielle believed that discrimination depended on who was doing the hiring. She said, “I think that all depends on the employer. Like say, the employer likes whites more than Blacks and a Black guy or Black women were going for the same spot, then I think, yeah, me being white would give me the advantage. But it might be a different employer who feels equally. So I think it depends on where you go to get the job.” Kasey also recognized that employers discriminate by saying, “More so in the past it was because of the separations and everything. But people they still get labeled” and suggested that she knows African Americans who are discriminated against. Kasey talked frankly with me about race. She said, “I know some of the best people that are Black, you know what I mean? And they're so, they're good Christians, they're nice people. They never shot up anyone. You know what I mean? And they get labeled that.”

Like Alexa, Danielle, and Kasey who believed that racism could hurt one's chances to reach a goal, Adriana and Amanda also white girls, believed that African Americans are discriminated against, but believed that discrimination “could work both ways.” Adriana believed that employers could be racist but it depended on “how they are racist,” meaning “they might go for a certain person over [another].” She explained that being of a minority race might work to one's advantage by suggesting that “it's like the perception that all Indian and Chinese people are smart. So depending on the person who is giving the interview or whatever, they might have a slightly better chance – even though they legally aren't supposed to do that.” Similarly, Amanda said African Americans “could be judged different” if there was a “racist person in college or a job interviewer,” but “it all depends because there could also be a Black person that didn't like white people. Then it could be worse for me.” While Amanda said she did not think she was likely to be discriminated against because she was white, she said “it could

happen.” Adriana’s and Amanda’s comments likely reflected the views of whites who worry about reverse discrimination.

In discussing whether or not race would impact their daughters’ futures, African American and white mothers responded quite differently. The African American mothers were extremely aware of the negative effects of race in their own lives and how being African American could potentially impact their daughters’ lives. They drew upon their own and their daughters’ painful experiences with racism to elaborate on the consequences of race. However, many African American mothers minimized these experiences, said race would not matter for their daughters’ future careers, and/or said they do not have conversations with their daughters about how race works in education and labor markets. White mothers, on the other hand, were less aware of the ways race could impact one’s future. When I asked questions about this they usually stated, “I am not a racist,” suggesting that they were raceless (because they assumed when I said race I meant being African American) and that race is only experienced by people of color. While half the white mothers recognized barriers to being African American, the other half indicated concern that their daughters could be discriminated against because they were white.

When I asked the African American mothers how race could impact their daughters’ futures, not only did they candidly share racist experiences they and their daughters encountered but they also used these experiences to explain why they knew their daughters would face racial barriers in achieving their goals. For example, Anita talked extensively about her experiences as an African American woman trying to overcome a drug addiction. She believed that not only her incarceration, but more importantly her race, made it difficult for her to secure housing and a job. She said, “Here I am, an African American, 43 years old. They figure I should have known

better.” When she gained employment, she learned she would receive no sympathy from her boss who she described as a white woman that dehumanized her by suggesting Black women could do little for her. Later, when I asked if she thought all young people had the same chance to grow up and be what they wanted, she said “No,” and explained that she worried for her daughter that “just because of her color, she would not be treated fairly if something would open.” She explained that she believed her daughter was currently being overlooked for academic opportunities because she was African American. She said, “I already know that they could put her down Point Park College or Robert Morris College because those schools are affiliated with [her daughter’s school], but they’ve never, not once, offered her that chance.” Anita’s frustration with her daughter’s school had gotten to the point where she was considering removing her. She explained, “She has excelled in that school and I said to the teacher a couple of weeks ago, I said, ‘Is it because she is Black that she does so well in that school that you have a problem with her?’ [She] couldn’t answer me. I said, ‘Ok. You’ve been asking me to take her out of the school anyway. You just answered my question.’” From her own discriminatory experiences and those her daughter was currently facing, Anita knew first hand that race mattered when reaching one’s goals. However, like many other mothers, Anita said she did not talk to her daughter about this. Like Anita, every African American mother drew on some experience in they and/or their daughter’s lives to discuss how race impacted their futures yet, only two of the seven discussed such racial barriers with their daughters.

Cheri explained in depth, several incidences of racism experienced by her daughter, including how, when her family first moved into their neighborhood and were one of only a few African American families, many white parents took issue with their children playing with Cheri’s daughter and “used the N word.” Cheri said one white mother referred to her daughter as

“my little nigger daughter.” Cheri explained that “it broke my heart” and that she and her husband told her daughter that they were not prejudiced but that other families, particularly white families, could be. Cheri and her husband warned their daughter, “when you see people like that, they are ignorant and you just stay away.” Still, Cheri was extremely hurt by the incidents; especially because she thought that moving into a nicer neighborhood would bring better opportunities for her family. Yet when I asked Cheri if she ever talked to her daughter about how race might affect her chances of reaching her goals, she replied, “No. Huh uh,” saying that she did not think race would pose barriers for her daughter. She explained, “You know what, I don’t see too much of an issue. And it was strange, like I said, when I brought that up, it’s always the ones that’s older. The younger people don’t even see stuff like that. I believe poor people and the older people are the ones that hold on to the hate of race.” Cheri saw the racism her daughter experienced in the local neighborhood, yet she did not see racism extending into education or the labor market.

Of the seven African American mothers with whom I discussed race in detail, only two said that they had specifically talked to their daughters about racial barriers they could face when pursuing their goals. Kira summarized these mothers’ feelings when she said she did not want her daughters “walking around blind like ain’t nuttin’ happening cause there’s a lot of stuff happening. So I just want them to know, it’s out there and you all need to know about it and you need to know how to handle it ‘cause there is consequences to everything.” Both Vivian and Kira spoke candidly about race with their daughters, unlike other mothers.

While all African American mothers recognized that race could affect their daughter’s futures, many white mothers believed that racism would not impact their daughters’ futures nor could it impact the futures of people of color. In the words of Tina and Julie, “if you can do the

job, there is no reason why you can't have it." Moreover, Karen who had seen people of color "rise up on the totem pole" at her job even though "back in the day you would not have seen them up there" believed that "color does not have anything to do with how far you can go in life." She argued that "some of the richest people are minority people" and that "Your brain isn't Black or white. Everybody's brain is the same." Beth did not believe that race matters in reaching one's goals, so she did not talk to her daughter about it. She said her daughter "has Black cousins so it's not a big deal." She did say that she thought her daughter was "afraid of Blacks" but she was not sure why. When her daughter expressed fear in going to a racially mixed high school, she told her "They're the same as anybody else. I says, 'if you get into a fight, take their eyes out. And then they'll stop fighting.'" While these mothers believed that race did not matter in reaching one's goals, other mothers believed their daughter's white race could potentially serve as a barrier to reaching their goals because today people of color are more likely to be favored over whites in education and the workplace.

Amy said she did not talk to her daughter about race in relation to reaching her goals, and said she believed people of color were favored in the education system. She said, "I almost think that sometimes the Black race gets more chances with free, with lower costs in college and sports scholarships, which is a shame, to feel that way." Similarly, Barb felt that Affirmative Action programs could hurt her daughter and she discussed this with her daughter. She said, "I am not prejudiced. But we do talk about the fact that you're like almost discriminated against because you are white." She went on to explain that the college she currently attends has "groups for just for the Black woman, the Black this, the Black that, the African American this," and concluded that "when you're a white woman, you are, I believe, discriminated against." Moreover, she believed that there were more financial opportunities for education for African American women

than white women. Finally, Trudy and Leslie also mentioned “reverse discrimination” but said their husbands, not them, discussed with their daughters the possibility of having opportunities taken away from them because they were white. While not as blatantly racist as she indicated her husband could be, Trudy still believed that Affirmative Action could hurt her daughter. Referring to minorities, she said “sometimes they get the opportunity before she might. I don't think that's fair, I think everybody should be equal and she knows that.” Leslie's sentiments about race echoed those of Trudy. She explained what her husband professed to her daughter about race and reaching one's goals as follows:

As far as Blacks maybe getting more opportunities than whites, her dad tells her about it all the time, cause he is very racist. They get all the breaks. You could go for a scholarship and have a 4.0 and have all these qualities but this guy, just because he is Black you know, and barely got a 2.0 he is gonna get it. I guess to a degree he is right, but you don't have to put it that way to these kids. You have to put it like, you know regardless of the politics, regardless of the way it is, it's the rules and that's how it is and the only way you can get by that is to be instrumental in changing the rules. You know, but he doesn't look at things like that. He is just diarrhea of the mouth.

While Leslie agreed that her husband had some ground for warning his daughter about reverse racism, she concluded by acknowledging that he is somewhat inaccurate. She said,

Her dad is a racist and he just makes it seem as though the whites are the ones that are oppressed. *NO*, it's not because Black people are always gonna be looked down on by somebody. Nobody is ever going to look down on me cause I am white, like I never have to live that life, never have to walk in those shoes, and they get it as soon as they are born.

Leslie taught her daughter to treat people equally, yet her belief that Affirmative Action programs could hurt her daughter may be nonetheless teaching her a more subtle racism. All mothers who believed Affirmative Action programs were reverse racism insisted that they were

“not racist.” Yet, as scholars like Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) show, such talk enables people to disavow their racism while still maintaining racist beliefs.

4.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I examined who the girls want to become. I argued that the contexts in which aspirations are formed are more important than aspirations themselves. By examining the factors that influence the girls’ aspirations—television, family, and schools—I showed how gendered, classed, and race-based practices within these contexts influence girls’ perceptions of their futures in both positive and negative ways. Television provides girls with ideas about possible careers but these jobs are glamorized and incongruent with local labor markets. These inaccurate portrayals of potential occupations and women who have it all, may be more damaging for poor and working class girls’ who have less resources to critically view these options. Families teach girls to care, but this can result in aspirations for low-wage, service jobs, and traditional jobs. In addition, girls aspired to jobs that neither their mothers nor adults close to them had, making it difficult to negotiate education and labor market systems. Finally, I found that while girls and parents wanted to rely on schools to provide them with education and career information that their own families could not provide, they reported that the school was not an adequate resource and they had difficulty seeing the connection between school and work. I also found that the girls’ aspirations for family and material resources are similar to their mothers in wanting close knit families, and different from their mothers’ in wanting fewer children and more privacy, space, and material items. Finally, I found that while girls and mothers sometimes recognize gender, class, and racial barriers in reaching their goals, they

believe that American middle class ideals of equality, equal opportunity, hard work, motivation, and personal responsibility can overcome these barriers.

Chapter three outlined who the girls are, and showed how daily life shapes poor and working class girls' sense of self. Chapter four illustrated how gendered, classed, and racialized practices within the media, family, and schools shape poor and working class girls' career, familial, and material aspirations but result in different outcomes with some girls aspiring to professional jobs and others to lower skilled and waged jobs, primarily cosmetology. In chapter five, I move to what the girls are doing to realize their aspirations. I argue that even when girls share similar backgrounds, subtle factors in their lives can set them onto very different paths in planning and fulfilling education and career goals.

5.0 HOW ARE THE GIRLS REACHING THEIR GOALS?

In chapters three and four I showed that who the girls are and who they wanted to become were influenced by gender, class, and race-based practices within the media, family, and school. In this chapter, I explore what the girls were doing to realize their aspirations and illustrate that they were preparing for the future in different ways. I show that while class and race place limits on how all of these girls will realize their future goals, within these limits, the resources girls have among themselves, their families, and their schools also set them onto very different paths. Among this group of girls, different resources were possessed and activated as they began to take the steps toward realizing their aspirations. These resources were not related to girls' social class (poor, working poor, or working class), race, or level of aspiration (high or low). As a result, I argue that we cannot homogenize how poor and working class girls will negotiate the gendered, classed, and racial barriers they confront as they prepare for the future since individual, familial, and school differences shape poor and working class girls differently. In the next section, I show that resourcefulness, dispositions toward reaching their goals, and the activation of resources vary among poor and working class, white and African American girls.

5.1 GIRLS' RESOURCEFULNESS AND FUTURE DISPOSITIONS

In this section, I examine girls' resourcefulness and dispositions toward realizing their goals. Some girls spoke positively about themselves and their futures and saw planning for the future as important. They also activated resources that enhanced their career preparedness such as working hard in school, joining numerous activities, and choosing friends who challenged them academically. Other girls talked more ambiguously about themselves, acknowledging both positive and negative self-attributes and had uncertain dispositions towards planning for the future. While they made attempts to activate career planning resources, they did not always choose the appropriate means to do so. They also resisted, but sometimes bought into negative peer influences. Finally, a number of girls talked negatively about themselves, their dispositions on planning and reaching their goals were bleak, hung around other kids that influenced their negative feelings toward school and their futures, and were limited in their activation of career planning resources. Mothers affirmed the girls' resourcefulness and dispositions toward the future as some talked positively about their daughters' maturity and responsibility and others described how their daughters struggled with school and peer pressure.

Some girls described themselves and futures positively. For example, when I asked Danae what her mother expected of her she said, "That I keep my grades up and I need to be well behaved you know, not like a pompous princess or anything but like a normal person with manners." When I asked Natasha what was important in her life she illustrated her wisdom by saying, "Everything is important because you don't live in this life very long. So everything is important and shouldn't be taken for granted." Danae and Natasha illustrated not only a sense of maturity but also an understanding that they should be responsible young people.

These same girls were also motivated about reaching their goals. When I asked Adriana what age she thought it was important to begin thinking about career goals she replied, “I’d say like mid-teens, say fourteen, fifteen but I plan ahead a lot. Like I’ve planned my next fifteen years out, for the most part.” She also said that her current age was the time when “your mindset starts thinking, ‘hey you know what, I’m going to be going to college in four years,’” indicating that it was her responsibility to begin preparing for college now. Amanda also took planning for her future very seriously. She said, “Well no matter what I do, I want to have a back-up plan. I want to start my own business and so I’m taking some business classes, just to learn basic stuff. And right now, I think around middle-school age you really need to start getting serious.” Finally, Danae showed her career-orientedness by stating the steps necessary to reach her future goal of becoming a veterinarian. She said, “If you want to be a veterinarian, you got to go to a regular college for four years and then a veterinary school for four years. And you have to take an exam. Then you have to open your own business... I researched the whole thing.” These girls took their future planning seriously.

To remain focused on school, these same girls chose to hang out with friends who shared their interest in school and who they deemed “mature.” Natasha talked about only having a small number of close friends in her school because she tried to stay away from the negative influences of peers. She spoke of one particular friend, Fred, with whom she “grew up” but their friendship had been “growing apart” because he wanted to “fool around all the time” and not take school seriously. In addition, her school district afforded students a choice as to which high schools they would attend and she felt this was an important decision. She explained that while other students would go wherever their friends wanted to go, she wanted to choose a school with the best academic program. Similarly, Danae preferred to hang out with friends who were

academically successful as she described her best friend as a “straight-A student” and suggested that was the reason they were friends. As she said, “I think that’s what kind of brought us together because the teachers kind of paired us up and that’s how we got friends because I was a straight-A student.” The friends with whom these girls chose to associate provided them with a peer group that offered academic support and challenged them academically. As they shared these interests with their friends they also began to compete in the academic world. As Leslie, a mother, commented on her daughter, “She has always just been A/B student and then all of these 4.0’s just started coming out and so now she is striving because her friends have influenced her. She has chosen friends that are school oriented, future oriented, you know.” Positive influences, not just from teachers, but also from school peers, were important in shaping the girls’ expectations and aspirations (Devine, 2004).

Several mothers suggested their daughters needed little motivation when it came to performing well in school and taking steps toward their futures. Trudy said she did not have to worry about her daughter being academically prepared for college because “she’s so advanced in her math class that her teacher gives her her own work to do. She’s not graded on it of course but just to try and challenge her.” Trudy even said that she thought her daughter put too much pressure on herself explaining that she got a B on a project in her technical drawing class and was “devastated because she’s never brought home anything less than an A.” Barb, who explained that both she and her own mother had early and unexpected pregnancies which limited their reaching their goals, believed that her daughter would not repeat their mistakes because “of her convictions and strength of conviction on that. So I can say with pretty good assurance those are things that won’t happen.” Barb suggested that her daughter was too interested and involved in school and church to make a “mistake” like early pregnancy. Shakira also said that she did

not worry about relationships with boys getting in the way of her daughter reaching her goals because her daughter often articulated to Shakira and her friends, “I don't have time for that. You know, I'm going to high school next year. I got to stay focused.” She also said that instead of revolving her life around boys, her daughter sought out educational opportunities as a way to spend her free time, citing her daughter's interest in attending a summer program for “gifted students.” Moreover, Shakira's daughter had “gotten top honors in her class in any school that she's been in,” has been “chosen for a number of scholarship opportunities,” and has “always been that, like they say, the alpha girl.” Finally, Cheri believed her daughter's confidence distinguished her from her siblings and would provide her with the ability to reach her goals. She said, “My oldest daughter didn't have the confidence. But when she [daughter participating in the study] knows she could do something, she has some strong confidence. Her confidence level is super strong.”

Unlike the girls described above, other girls did not possess such self-assuredness, had uncertain dispositions towards planning for the future, and while they made attempts to activate career planning resources, they were not always sure where to obtain resources. Their friends, at times, also influenced them in negative ways. While most of these girls said they were “outgoing,” “friendly,” “caring,” and “good” at particular tasks, these girls also worried about coming off as “conceited,” assuring me that they were not “cocky,” and admitted to having “bad attitudes,” and “smart mouths.” For example, getting Jessica to say something positive about herself was difficult. When I asked her to describe herself, she said, “I'm shy. Not very talkative. Not very popular either. I'm nice, and I make friends easily, but I'm not outgoing.” I pushed Jessica to tell me about any special gifts or talents she had and she finally said, “Well in grade school I used to be the best colorer in my class, but now, not really.” Like Jessica, many

other girls revealed an uncertainty in their abilities. Rebecca said that her grades “could be better,” and that not having top grades in her class could prevent her from reaching her goals and Keyanna said her “lack of patience” could prevent her from reaching her goals.

These girls were conflicted in their understanding of the educational requirements, professional duties, and workplaces for the occupations to which they aspired. When I asked Alexa which courses one has to take to be a criminal lawyer, she said, “Not sure, I know you have to go to school for like six years. So probably a lot. Like [learning] the way you debate on like who’s guilty and who’s not and they probably teach you like how to know if they’re guilty or not.” When I asked her what courses were important to take to become a computer technician, her other career aspiration, she replied, “Probably a lot about how computers work and stuff and putting microbites and what parts of the computer you’d be working with.” Like Alexa, Jessica was not sure what courses she would need to pursue a career in photography, nor was she currently enrolled in the photography course offered at her school, even though she thought she might want to pursue a career in that field. Keyanna was also unsure which courses were appropriate to take to be a psychologist but thought that her “creative writing” course would be important. She was also reluctant to attend school for the amount of time it took to become a psychologist. She said, “I’m pretty sure you have to go to school for four years, I don’t think it is two years, but I really don’t want to go to school for four years. I only want to go for two so, I don’t know. But the one lady that works here told me she went for *more* than four. She got like two different degrees and I am like *NO!*” Keyanna’s aspiration to become a psychologist may not be realized because she did not want to attend school for the length of time required.

Most of these girls gave ambiguous responses about how they would get the information they needed to learn more about and plan for their futures. Alexa said she would use “the Internet and books and people older than me,” as resources to help her learn more about her career aspiration. More specifically, she said she would “do what I always do, I just go to Google and type in what are some basic things you need to know about criminal lawyers and computer technicians.” At first, Jessica said she would have “no idea” where to go to get information on her career aspiration but would probably look online “like AskJeeves and just ask them a question.” Keyanna said she would “probably look it up,” referring to using the Internet for information she needed to learn more about her career and “would just go to Google and type it in.” Finally, Kyra would “just look at books and talk to people who are experienced” within her career field but then was unsure of which specific books and did not know anyone personally who she could ask. Moreover, when I asked her what kinds of questions she would explore in these medium she said, “I don’t know. It’s a good idea, you just got to get me to do it.” While these girls were likely to learn more about resources as they age, their current ambiguity and admitted lack of motivation combined with minimal adults with education and career knowledge will make it difficult to reach their goals.

These girls also struggled with feeding into negative peer influences. Kassidy and Keyanna both did well in school, generally liked learning, and were involved in after school activities. However, they did not like having to deal with peers who they claimed were often problematic. At the beginning of her interview Kassidy suggested that she hung out with a group of friends in school but the older girls “are not too fond” of her. She felt this was because she often had older boyfriends and they were jealous that she was dating boys in their peer group. As a result, these girls often harassed Kassidy. However, she made it clear that she hadn’t

succumbed to the pressure these girls put on her. She said, “You can give me as many dirty looks as you want, but it doesn’t bother me. It used to bother me but I kind of just gave up on it.” Yet the girls’ behaviors seemed to bother Kassidy as she brought up incidences such as this several times in the interview. Similarly, Keyanna said she struggled with getting caught up in negative peer interactions because they often had a poor impact on her school experience. She said, “I like learning...it’s not even like school, it’s the people I got to be around at school that I don’t really care too much for because boys are around just to distract you and females are around to distract you with their drama.” Kassidy and Keyanna struggled not to get caught up in the negativity brought on by their peers because it interfered with their schooling. Yet at the same time, they appeared to be negatively influenced by girl peers and overly concerned with their relationships with boys. Of all the girls in the study, these two girls talked most about having boyfriends and spending the most time with their boyfriends. In comparison to other participants, they were also most interested in the way they look, and spent a significant amount of interview time telling me about how they do their hair, how they dress, and how long it takes them to get ready for school.

Relatedly, Kassidy also described having friends who had been in trouble in a variety of ways, even though she stressed she would “never do any of that stuff.” She said her parents worried that she would “follow in my friends’ footsteps” and described having a friend who recently had an abortion and a boyfriend whom she recently broke up with because he was “into like a lot of drugs and that sort of thing.” In addition to having friends who have been involved with drugs, Kassidy struggled with a broken relationship with her aunt who was addicted to cocaine. While she insisted she doesn’t participate in the same types of behaviors, she said several times that because of incidences “in her past” her parents do not always trust her, yet she

remains friends with people who frequently “get in trouble,” and has friends whose parents do not care about them because these parents were out “drinking and partying” all the time. Struggling with her appearance, older girls who antagonize her, and having people with barriers surrounding her undoubtedly influences Cassidy’s ability to concentrate on school.

Jessica was a lot like Cassidy and Keyanna in the sense that peers influenced her feelings and behaviors. Jessica hung around other girls who were often in trouble at home, and one who recently became pregnant. She described her friends as getting “kicked out of the house all the time,” including one who frequently stayed at her house because “she always gets into a fight with her mom because of her boyfriend, he’s older.” It was possible that her home was the place to hang out because even though her grandparents lived next door and were readily available, Jessica was often left home alone overnight because her mother worked two jobs. In addition to having friends who got in trouble in and outside of school, Jessica seemed disconnected from school, even though she was involved in the school orchestra. She said really did not like school because the teachers favored the more advanced students over her peer group. Referring to the teachers she said, “They usually treat like the high honor roll people better than the like lower kids. Like I’m not like real low in academics but they just treat us different.” Perhaps feeling disconnected from school prevented Jessica from taking advantage of opportunities that fostered her interests. For example, she said she wanted to be a photographer but did not enroll in photography classes offered at school and she also said that she wanted to be an actress but was not involved in the school drama club and has never auditioned for the school play.

These girls’ mothers also affirmed their daughters’ ambiguity as they took steps to attain their future goals. Beth said that her daughter worked hard in school but she worried her aspirations were too high. She said, “I wouldn’t tell her but I don’t think she’ll have the drive to

do all that hard studying... and she struggles in math and reading.” Beth believed this was because her daughter was too caught up in her social life. She said, “She gets carried away. She’s a talker. So she gets carried away with her social life, and then her grades die, and then she puts her mind into her studies and then her grades go up. She has the potential of being probably a B student. But it takes a little more effort from her.” She concluded by saying, “Boys and cheerleading and clothes. Clothes, clothes, clothes. She’s so into the clothes now,” rather than her school work. Similarly, Vivian worried about her daughter taking initiative to participate in activities that could help her foster skills, knowledge, contacts, and opportunities. She said her daughter did not take advantage of an educational field trip in school or a tour of Black colleges offered by the youth program in which she participated. She said initially, her daughter was interested in taking advantage of these opportunities but then “when it came time to sign up, she changed her mind.” She also said she pushed her daughter to participate in such activities, but could not force her. For instance, she helped her daughter get a job through a local youth employment program and then said, “she only went for three days and then quit.” Vivian explained her daughter’s lack of interest by rationalizing, saying “She still wants to be a kid, she wants me to take care of her. She’s not ready for that yet. So I said, ‘ok, I understand that.’” Yet Vivian also mentioned that her daughter had problems in school. “I think biology she is having problems with but she brought her grade up to a C I think she said. Gym was basically her problem... she was having a lot of problems as far as the teachers, there was an argument. Then when they told her to do stuff she would have a little attitude but that’s changed a lot. But she does her homework.” She concluded that her daughter did well in school, but “She just has to get that ambition she just you know, it’s not there yet,” implying at some point, it would naturally come to her.

These girls' mothers also indicated that sometimes their daughters struggled with certain courses and/or school personnel and lacked the motivation to overcome these struggles. Kim said that her daughter did well in school but sometimes she has to "get on her" if her grades drop in a particular subject. Moreover, when Kim's daughter was presented with an option to take a "Scholar's test" in school to enter a program for gifted students, she said she had a long conversation with her about whether or not she was willing to take on the extra work that would come with being in the program. Anita also said that her daughter did very well in school but "she's sick of the school she's at." She felt that her daughter had "excelled in that school" and because her daughter was African American her teacher "has a problem with her." Moreover, Anita worried about her daughter's ability to make the "right choices" because as she said, she is a child of "two addicted parents." As a result, she felt she had to show her that "there are consequences behind all of her choices."

Moreover, many of these girls' mothers seemed attuned to negative peer influences as said they worried about their daughters making poor decisions because of peer influences. For example, Kim said her daughter's close friend "must think it's cool to get bad grades" and she frequently talked to her daughter about making better decisions than her friends do. She said she told her daughter, "If they are your real friends they won't care if you are smart or not." Similarly, Beth worried that her daughter would get "mixed up with the wrong crowd" and involved with drugs because her older sister had a boyfriend "who was into drugs" and she suspected her son was as well. Amy also worried about her daughter because at her daughter's age, she was into "partying." More worrisome to Amy though, was that she hoped her daughter would not make the "same mistakes as some of her girlfriends have made." She said this referring to the sexual experiences of her daughter's friends, which her daughter shared with her.

Vivian shared the same concerns as Amy, because “supposedly” her daughter’s best friend was pregnant and she caught her daughter at home alone with a group of female and male peers without permission or supervision.

Finally, a number of girls felt less positive about their futures, often described themselves as being unmotivated, and lacked the resources they needed to help them prepare for their futures. Jamyra said her friends had a better chance at succeeding than her “cause if they really wanted something they would focus more, like get things organized,” implying she was not motivated or organized enough to reach her goals. Katrina knew she was smart but could do better in school, but didn’t “try hard enough,” and when I asked Serena to describe herself, she said, “I do bad things. I make bad choices but when I make the bad choice I don’t think about the consequences.” Randi who was very shy and difficult to interview, also had a hard time talking positively about herself. She said she played hockey, but followed that with “but I am not exceptionally good.” Danielle described herself as a “diverse person” who “gets along with everybody” but then said “I’m not very, like, I am not a very dedicated person. Like if something is too hard, I kind of back up out of it.” More detrimentally, Star said, “I probably won’t even make it,” referring to reaching her goals. When I asked her what her life would be like when she was sixteen she said she would “probably be pregnant.” When I asked Serena what her life would be like when she was sixteen she said she would “probably be on house arrest,” or that she “might have a baby” by that time because her mother and care manager told her that she was “boy crazy” and needed to “slow down, and chill.” Elaina too was unsure about her future, given that at the time of our interview she was 14 years old and pregnant. When I asked her specific questions about how she planned to reach her goals, she said she hadn’t really thought about her future plans recently. She followed with, “Well I don’t know if

you heard [I know Elaina personally] but I am pregnant. So that's kind of my main focus right now." However, Elaina did see herself going to college and suggested that one should be thinking about college in their 12th grade year and actually taking steps toward that "right after high school." As a result, she said she did not really talk to anyone about her plans for college. Elaina's concern with her child and her sense that she did not have to start thinking about college until after high school illustrated how both her circumstances and her environment inhibited her ability to pursue her interests.

Other girls, like Brittany were uncertain where they could obtain career information and inaccurate in their understanding of what their career would entail. She thought that to learn more about her field of interest, she could just "read on it," and knew she was going to college, but not sure for what, even though she wanted to be an entertainer. Moreover, she believed that opportunities to become a "star" were available in the Houston area because her aunt lived there and had met many entertainers, but asserted that she would not go there because "I didn't want to go cause I don't want to fly on a plane." Randi and Danielle also indicated that they did not have many people to turn to for help with exploring their interests. Randi said she wanted to go to college but had "no idea" what college might be like and said she has never talked to anyone about going to college. Danielle was informed about the requirements to become a forensic scientist, indicating that it takes "eleven years to go to school and be able to get a job" as she has done research on it, but suggested that she was unsure if she would be able to attain her goal because she didn't know if she had "that kind of money to actually go and do that," referring to the extensive schooling required. These girls' sentiments reflect how many girls had hopes and aspirations, but were either uninformed about, or felt overwhelmed by taking the actual steps to reach these goals. Surely these ambiguities and uncertainties will influence their future planning.

These same girls relied on their beliefs of hard work and motivation to help them reach their goals, rather than articulating the steps necessary to do so like others did. Katrina said, she merely has to “just work hard and start thinking about it [future] harder to make it come true,” and Randi said she needed to “work hard and study about it and stuff” to reach her goals. Similarly, when I asked Serena what type of schooling one needed to become a cosmetologist, she said that not everyone needs to go to school because “some people just have talent but if you want to do hair for the celebrities, then I think you have to go to college for that.” Serena did not feel she had to do much to plan for her future because she viewed the success of a cosmetologist as coming from within.

These girls also reported the direct ways in which their friends negatively influenced their school performance. When I asked Charity who she hung out with at school, she said, “My friends. They’re just a bunch of friends that my mom really don’t like but I still hang out with them anyway.” She said her mother thinks “they are negative friends.” Similarly, Katrina described her best friend getting in trouble at school,

She has a smart mouth and she really likes to goof around.

[Does she get in trouble?]

Yeah

[Do you get in trouble?]

We have lunch detention at our school and we get one a year. But she got kicked off all the field trips this year.

While Katrina had not completely subsumed to the behaviors of her best friend, she admitted that she often participated in some of these behaviors.

Serena also talked about the ways she and her best friend influenced one another. When describing her school day she said, “I’m always late to math class because I am doing my hair....Me and her [best friend] we are always late to class together. We just do things

sometimes like I'll be like do you want to do this and she'll be like naw, I'm not trying to get in trouble...We get in trouble together, we get in, we get out." Later in the interview, Katrina told me that she was suspended five times last year for fighting in school, switched out of her courses for fighting, and predicted she would be "on house arrest" when she was sixteen.

Danielle and Elaina also talked about being part of "bad" peer groups. When I asked Danielle about her friends she said, "They are a little bit more risky, I'd say I like to hang out with the more out there crowd. Like quote, unquote, bad." When I asked her what she meant by risky, she said, "As in doing um, illegal things, um drugs mainly," qualifying her statement by reassuring me that she did not participate in this behavior but hung out with them because she grew up hanging out with "those types of people". Elaina also had problems with negative peer groups who influenced her behavior. She said, "I used to be like I guess you could say, like sweet and innocent and then I like, ran into the wrong crowd of people and got mixed into worse things and everything is straightened out now." She went on to explain that now that she is pregnant she is not "supposed to hang out with them people." Elaina's interview highlighted the casual ways in which the some girls talked about the social problems happening around them. Teen pregnancy, drugs, and fighting in schools, were all very much a part of many of these girls' everyday lives.

Boys and having boyfriends also influenced the girls' success in school. Many girls talked a lot about boys and being "boy crazy" but Star's preoccupation with her boyfriend was especially disheartening. During the interview, the more she talked about him, the more I noticed her obsession with him and the control he exerted over her. She began by saying she spends most of her time with her friends and her boyfriend but later in the interview suggested she was "about to break up with him" because he had been "playing some games," referring to

him not calling her when he was out with his friends. At the same time, however, she said, “he be gettin’ mad at me when I be hanging out with my friends.” Illustrating her preoccupation with him, she told me that she had other girls check up on him and “so far I had no bad news.” She then trivialized the way her boyfriend treats her,

Star: But we be playing around. He be telling her [Star’s friend] to tell me he fucked me or whatever, but we be playing around. But it doesn’t matter. He’s funny, he’s cool. But he’s just too quiet, like when he’s with me. He’s like for real for real, like trying to tell me what to do. Trying to say he be wearing the pants in this relationship.

[What do you say?]

Star: I’m like man, you’re a king, go ahead. And when his friends are around he want to like try to act hard or whatever. I mean I try to act hard too. But he try to base on me [make fun of] in front of his friends.

[What do you do? Do you stick up for yourself?]

Star: Yeah, but I would stick up for him too.

Star went on to say that she would fight for her boyfriend if she had to and then, asked me if she could use my cell phone to call him.

These girls’ mothers also suggested they faced difficult barriers in reaching their goals. Mary believed her daughter’s goals would be extremely inhibited by her Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), which she said was “very hard and frustrating to deal with.” She described her daughter’s moods and achievement at school as “sometimes she’s up and sometimes she’s down,” indicating that she worried about her daughter’s social and academic abilities. Likewise, Sylvia also worried about her daughters’ social and academic life. She said her daughter sat in the house frequently and “I have to force her to go outside.” She told her daughter, “even if you go sit on the porch, get outside, do something, make some friends, go find somebody.” She attributed her daughters’ unwillingness to go outside to “kids today are just lazy” and concurred that her daughter did not work hard in school and wanted a cell phone but was “too irresponsible” as she was constantly reminding her to “do this, and do that.” She also said that while her daughter was intelligent, she also “gives up too easy on certain things, and

assumes she can't do it." She thought her daughter's lack of motivation would prevent her from reaching her goals. However, in the interview she also mentioned that her daughter was frequently "teased about her weight." Interestingly, Sylvia did not equate the teasing her daughter suffered with her lack of motivation, "laziness," or low self-esteem. In fact, Sylvia did not believe the teasing "bothers her too much anymore." Sylvia also never mentioned that her daughter was pregnant at the time of the interview, something I found out a few months after the interview. I imagined that her daughter's "laziness" and "lack of motivation" was probably due to being teased and pregnant, rather than lacking a work ethic as Sylvia suggested, especially because her daughter told me in her interview that when people "mess with you, you can lose confidence and give up on your goals."

Many of these mothers put a lot of pressure on their daughters to succeed because they felt they were not successful nor were their older siblings. Kira expected her thirteen year old daughter to succeed because she was not certain that her eldest daughter could "because she doesn't like or do well in school." She knew she put a lot of pressure on her daughter but she said she had to because living in their neighborhood put her in an environment that could easily "make her feel sort of trapped like she can't do anything." Kira talked extensively about growing up in the "ghetto," being trapped in it herself, having to raise her girls there, and wanting more for her daughters. Yet at the same time she said that her daughter was not doing well in school. She explained her daughter's difficulties in school as follows:

Well she slipped this report card. I found out that she was going through a little something about her dad, so that's why she said, that's why she was kind of slackin, but she said she is back on track now. Cause I couldn't get, I couldn't figure it out cause I never seen them grades come from her so I knew there had to be something wrong. So when I talked to her she told me what was goin on with her. So I was like ok, I felt a little bit better cause I thought I was gonna kill her... like wait a minute what's goin on? So she was going through some stuff.

While Kira had the wherewithal to recognize her daughter was having difficulty with her father, she did not say she was helping her daughter get help emotionally or academically. Instead, her comments indicated that her daughter's slipping grades were a result of this one incident and she would do better in the next grade period. Yet, on top of not doing well in school and having issues with her father, Kira's daughter had a sister that was uninterested in school and the family lived in a neighborhood that Kira felt was unsafe and where people did not prosper. Kira illustrated the layers of barriers—family, school, and neighborhood—that would likely inhibit her daughter's ability to reach her goals and how she expected her to overcome these barriers.

Tina also acknowledged that her daughter was picking up negative social and academic behaviors. Tina described herself as a “heavy smoker” and said her daughter also started smoking. She said she tried to use her own poor health as an example to get her daughter to stop. She also said she worried her daughter would pick up on her eating habits and become too overweight like her. In the area of work, she feared her daughter would not be motivated because she felt her daughter wanted to “sit around” and expected “everybody's going to give her what she wants. Because that's what's happened all her life.” In school, she said that her daughter has been struggling in Algebra for two years and “must be mentally blocked.” Tina tried to help her daughter by getting a tutor from the school but said the tutor was not helping her, “and this is the second year she's taking it and she still can't get it.” Tina suggested that she could not help her daughter do the work, and getting her a tutor from the school has been ineffective. Like Kira, Tina left remedying the problems up to her daughter, and attributed her lack of success and potential difficulty in reaching her goals to her daughter's own motivation and work ethic.

Other girls' mothers worried especially about their daughters' involvement with boys and peer pressure. Sylvia said she tried to encourage her daughter not to have a boyfriend right now and to "go to school and take care of herself." She said she also told her that "guys only want the one thing or they want to be controlling" and worried about the peer pressure kids her daughter's age have to face. She said, "You know it's not me trying to shelter her, but the different things that go on in the communities and what not." She added that she knew her daughter could be influenced into smoking or getting high and that times are much different from the days when she was growing up. She said, "But now your looking at your kids from eight to thirteen there out there slinging drugs or gang banging or killing one another... and then look at the different um, states and schools out of state and stuff where all the killing is going on now. So you just got to look at it like that."

Kira also said that she worried about her daughters getting "sidetracked" by boys but worried more about how peers in her community could negatively influence her daughter:

A lot of young kids coming up today, a lot of them don't even leave out of their little neighborhoods, so they don't even know there is more. I try to tell them [her daughters] that there is *more*, I know this is where we from, I know we ain't really been no where, but there is a *world out there* and you *do not* have to stay here, you do not. Do not think that you are confined to the ghetto cause we still here.

Kira worried that her daughters could be influenced by the negativity that she described plaguing her community, suggested that other young people from her neighborhood lacked direction and more importantly, opportunity, and illustrated how negative peer pressure influenced the girls' everyday lives and how these pressures could potentially hurt their futures.

5.1.1 How Girls' Resourcefulness and Dispositions Matter

The ways girls described their resourcefulness, dispositions toward the future, and motivation to reach their goals illustrates that some of the girls were formulating and activating social and cultural capital while others were struggling to define their goals and find the resources they needed to begin to reach them. Only a small number of girls knew what they wanted in their futures, how to get there, and sought adequate resources they needed to plan their futures. These girls also chose friends who challenged them academically. These girls, who felt positive about themselves and had an optimistic disposition toward the future, also sought out information about their careers and felt motivated to attain their goals. By activating capital, these girls were different from others who were struggling to set, learn about, and be motivated to attain their goals. Still many girls felt unmotivated, were unaware of the requirements necessary to reach their goals, and negatively influenced by peers. They had the most difficulty expressing positive attributes and lacked knowledge about their fields of interest and cited ambiguous resources; they were clearly not as equipped or prepared and will likely need more resources to reach their goals.

5.2 FAMILY RESOURCES

Most young people obtain resources to plan for their futures from adults close to them. In poor and working class families, where many children spend much of their time with immediate and extended relatives, young people are likely to seek advice from adults in their families. However, in this study, many of adult family members were neither experienced nor

knowledgeable about the girls' fields of interest. Moreover, in many cases, these adults faced barriers that made it difficult to find and provide the information the girls needed. In this section, I illustrate how familial involvement in the girls' career planning varied such that some girls could count on their families for education and career resources while others could not. As shown in chapters three and four, families are important influences on who the girls are and who they want to become. However, families provide different resources for their girls and the girls differ in how they respond.

While all of the girls appeared to have strong relationships with their parents, the extent to which parents were involved in their education and structuring their leisure time varied. In the next section, I show how some families sent girls off to school every morning, helped them make educational decisions, talked to them about their futures, and provided information and resources for future planning. Others worked long hours in strenuous jobs, lacked knowledge and resources to help their daughters plan for the future, and were dealing with personal barriers that impeded their ability to manage the girls' current and future lives.

5.2.1 Family Time and Involvement in Career Planning

While all of the girls spent a lot of time with their families, how this time was structured and the extent to which families participated in career-exploration and planning activities differed. In some families, cultural capital was cultivated in family activities. For example, Natasha said what she liked most about her family was that they all spent time together on the weekends participating in various activities and outings like going to church and camping. In addition, she enjoyed writing poetry and "playing on the Internet" with her mother. Beyond spending such quality time, she also said she talked frequently with both of her parents about her

future education and career goals. For example, she and her father talked about her future as a potential WNBA player as they watched basketball games on television. Her mother was also heavily involved in helping her decide which high school she would attend, as students in her district can choose their high schools. She explained that she and her mother “just start naming schools” and weighed the pros and cons of each. She and her mother also used the school and career choices of her older siblings to discuss Natasha’s education and career path. In addition, her parents talked with her about sending her to live with her grandmother to attend school because she lived in a more well-respected school district.

Danae’s family was also extensively involved in her education and provided her with resources that helped foster educational experiences. Danae explained that her mother helped her successfully secure a college scholarship and she and her parents often had conversations about her future. Similarly, Amanda described her family as “*Great!*” because they had fun together watching television and singing and her mother revolved her day around driving her and her brother to school and picking them up from sports and other after school activities. She also spent time outside of school with her mother who was the leader of her youth group and admired her father for his business expertise and entrepreneurship. She said her father frequently took her to work with him (he is a Karaoke DJ) and paid her for helping. She really admired both of her parents because “they know so many people” with whom they can put her in contact as she explored her career interests. Kasey’s parents also talked extensively with about her future. For example, she said, “My mom and I, we talk through to see why would I do that? Like the pros and cons for each [potential career].” These girls spent a lot of time with their families, and during this time, talked extensively with their parents about their futures.

Even though other girls also had close relationships with family members, time spent with family did not revolve around structured activities and was limited, leading them to spend more time with their peer groups. These girls were also less likely to be able to speak of the direct ways in which immediate and extended family members could help them plan for the future. Many of these girls were likely to live with single mothers who worked and often balanced more than one job or school and work, perhaps not just limiting the time they spent with their daughters, but also the time they had to gather resources for them. Alexa talked about going shopping with her mother and Rachel discussed having to be home for dinner every night, the special desserts her mother prepared, and doing crafts and maintaining traditions with her family. However, they did not speak of spending much time participating in family outings, games, or educational activities. They described their mothers as busy working and taking care of their younger siblings.

When I asked the girls if they wanted lives like their mothers, some of them said their mothers lacked energy and time. Keyanna said she did not want a life like her mother because she “has no life. She wakes up, and she goes to work, and that’s really it. She comes home and she sleeps. That’s all.” She added, “My mom, she doesn’t go out, she has no life. She just basically goes to work and takes care of my little brother and sister.” Similarly, Jessica who lived with her single mother said that her mother’s days are very busy and she is often overworked and tired. She said a typical day for her mother is “Getting up, rushing around the house, getting ready, and always late. Then she goes to work and comes home. If she’s not doing anything she sleeps, and then sometimes she goes to her job at night. So she’s always running places.”

While other girls talked with their mothers about their futures, these conversations did not inform them of how to take steps to reach their goals. Kyra and Brittany both said that their mothers told them “the sky is the limit,” and “working is a lot of responsibility,” yet when I asked them if they talked about their future career plans with their mothers, Kyra said, “I didn’t start working on anything yet” and Brittany said, “No.” Similarly, Keyanna said that her mother talked to her about going to college and she thought her mother went to college but “she didn’t graduate though. I think she dropped out cause she got pregnant, I don’t know. She said it was a good school or whatever, but nobody really talks to me about going to college except for my cousin. She didn’t go to college either though.” Even though Keyanna’s mother and cousin talked to her about going to college and had these expectations of her, she said they did not really do anything to help her meet those expectations and concluded, “Honestly if I didn’t want to listen to my mom, I wouldn’t. You get to that certain age where you are going to do what you want to do, so I mean her talking about it don’t make me wanna do it any more or less. I am gonna do what I want to do and that’s what I want to do,” indicating she did not need her mother to tell her what to do because she already had established these goals herself.

Some girls also said they would rely on other family members for the resources they needed to help them reach their goals. Jessica had a brother who was working on a Master’s degree and knew she and her mother could draw from his experiences applying to and attending college to help her through the process. She also had grandparents who lived next door and provided both financial and emotional support to her and her family. Alexa suggested that her father’s friend is a computer technician and she could go to him to learn more about the field. In addition, she spent a lot of time with her grandparents who supported her family. Kassidy said that her grandmother provided much emotional support, and that her grandmother could help her

find information to plan for her future. Similarly, Ebony suggested that several of her cousins attended college and her aunt lives in Maryland and she often talked to them about attending Howard University.

However, many of these same girls' family members faced difficult barriers, including single parenting, unexpected pregnancies, and issues with drugs and alcohol. Alexa's mother juggled a full-time job and college courses while being the sole provider for her children. Her father lived out of state and her step-brother's father was incarcerated. The difficulty her mother faced managing her everyday life was evident in Alexa's response when I asked her if she wanted a life like her mother's. She replied,

Like um, well I want a different job and I don't want a job that's like you're gone all day and then come home and just like make dinner. And just like never talk to your family at all. And um, well actually, while I'm in school, I don't want kids. 'Cause then your like, oh I have to come home, I have to cook dinner, and if you don't have kids, you go home cook a single meal and then do the homework you need to do. And then go to school the next day. And then, I don't want to have kids at a young age. That's really it.

Rebecca also had close family members in difficult circumstances. Her older sister was twenty-one and had two children with two different fathers. Because he struggled with a drug addiction, the first father left her shortly after she had their child. Rebecca spent a lot of her time at her sister's house, "playing with the babies." In addition, her older brother was often "in trouble" and her family was concerned that he hung out with the "wrong crowd." Keyanna and Kyra said that they talked with older cousins about going to college but these family members did not attend college. In fact, while they had close relationships with these female family members, the advice they received from them was mostly warning them not to repeat their mistakes. While these women were role models and supported the girls, they did not attend college and probably would not be able to guide their younger cousin on how to apply to college.

For a number of girls, immediate and extended families were not involved in structuring their daily lives. These girls did not describe fun family outings, playing games, or talking about their futures with their families. While they did say they relied on their mothers and grandmothers for support, and had close relationships with them and other family members, their interviews focused more on the time spent with their peer groups. Moreover, these girls talked about parents—mothers in particular—who confronted issues with drugs and alcohol, siblings who got in trouble or did poorly in school, cousins who had unexpected pregnancies and abusive relationships, and family members with illnesses. Few of these girls were confident that they could rely on their family members for help in planning and preparing for their futures.

Danielle, whose mother and father suffered from drug addiction, described a typical day for her mother as, “She goes to work, then goes to the bar. That’s about it.” Danielle talked at length about having Children and Youth Services involved in her life and appeared upset when she said her 18 year old sister was currently in jail. While Danielle’s father was involved in her life, she did not live with him and he was struggling with recovery from drug addiction. She explained, “Recently he’s gone through rehab. And he’s coming on to eight months clean and so like I’m really proud of him. And like he kind of makes me realize that he had been through over thirty years of drug abuse so for him to be able to overcome that, it makes me look up to him and admire him.” Danielle had a lot of respect for her father, to whom she felt very close, but seemed to have a conflicting relationship with her mother who she said was not someone who she usually talks to about her future. Danielle lived with her mother and described her relationship with her parents as follows, “My dad just kind of wants me happy. He’s a little more, like he talks to me more about it [her future]. My dad is more involved in my life, emotionally. My mom is more there financially.” She added, “My dad is usually the one I talk

to about my plans for the future, my grades and stuff. My mom usually just she sees the report card at the end of the nine weeks but she doesn't usually keep up with me on a regular basis."

Danielle also admitted that her family has struggled because of her parents' drug abuse and hopes to change her lifestyle as an adult. She said,

It's been rough. We've had to move from house to house and it ended in a divorce and it's not a really happy way to live. It's just really an upsetting kind of thing. So I don't really want to raise kids in a broken family and having to move from school, cause I've been to six different schools, so I kind of want to keep it more of a stable kind of family.

Like other girls, Danielle had older siblings who did not model positive behaviors. Danielle had an 18 year old sister in jail. Another girl, Jamyra, lived at home with her mother and six siblings and when I asked her what her mother expected of her she said, "She expects me to be, not like my brother out there [on the streets] but on the honor roll and do something with my life." Jamyra also said her family lived in an unsafe neighborhood where there were "a lot of shootings" and her mother constantly worried about her safety and Katrina said that her mother wanted her to go to college because "she don't have a lot of hope for my sister."

Familial problems and burdens meant that some girls felt their parents were apathetic about their well-being. Jamyra told me that her mother seemed overwhelmed trying to deal with daily life, her children, and an illness. When I asked her to describe a typical day for her mother, she replied,

She stays in her room a lot because she is sick. She will just get up and go through her mail and stuff. Her room is junky, it has all these papers around. So she will go through her mail and then she will watch Judge Hattchet or Jerry Springer. Then she will take a nap, she'll get back up and then she will eat and then, just, I don't know, go through her mail again.

Like Jamyra, other girls felt disconnected from their mothers. Danielle described her mother as "not necessarily so concerned with what I do" and Randi referred to her mother as "Well, she

isn't exactly the kind of person that worries that much." Later in the interview, when I asked Randi if she wanted a life like her parents, she said, "I will probably get stressed over things more than she [her mother] does cause she's really laid back." Serena also indicated wanting to have her parents more involved, especially her father. When I asked her if she wanted a life like her mother she replied, "Three kids, dad don't work. NO! My kids' dad is going to be next to me every step of the way." While undoubtedly, these girls' parents loved and cared about them, the issues they struggled with in their own lives and the lives of their other children put strain on the relationships they had with their daughters. These familial barriers took away from the time and energy they could use to foster their daughters' interests, education, and career goals. Mothers appeared to bear the most burdens from familial barriers and their consequences were evident in the varying amounts and types of resources they could provide for their daughters. I now examine the mothers' varying roles in helping their daughters plan and prepare for the future.

5.2.2 Mothers' Resources

To help their daughters, mothers had varying levels of resources from which to draw and their resourcefulness often depended on the types and amount of difficult familial barriers they confronted. Several mothers reported having the knowledge, skills, and contacts to help their daughters plan for their futures. When I ask Barb how she would help her daughter learn more about her career of interest, in addition to doing her own research on the Internet she said,

I'd go to guidance [office]. I have good friends there. Because I'm at the school and really good friends with a lot of her teachers on a personal level and her guidance counselors. It's very nice. I'm actually very, very spoiled in that and I have such a support system in that anything I don't know I can go to them and they'll steer me clear.

Barb's job at the local school provided her with "friends" in the guidance office from whom she could find information about her daughter's future career plans. Similarly, through her job as a food service worker at a university, Cheri introduced her daughter to college students who were pursuing the same career path as her daughter.

These mothers not only used their own knowledge and contacts to find resources to help their daughters plan, they also structured their daughters' time in such a way to build cultural capital. For example, Shakira taught her daughter from an early age to enjoy and find the educational value in reading. She said,

I'm a stickler on education. I believe that reading is big... [with it] the imagination can go many places. With reading you can learn a lot. With reading the visual is there, you can learn to speak, spell, use things in context. I just think it really envelopes a whole bunch of educational growth opportunities... and she reads avidly.

Moreover, Shakira, who "runs a mentoring program" planned to get her daughter involved with a mentor who worked in her field of interest since she had limited contacts in that particular field and was helping her daughter enroll in a summer program for "gifted students." She claimed that her role in her daughter's future planning was to be "the resource person" because even though she lived with her husband, "I am the one who put them in school, I go to the meetings, I do everything with them, I do the homework, I do the talking with them." More recently, Shakira was involved in helping her daughter choose which high school she would attend in the coming year and concluded, "There are just some decisions that I just have to make. And that [choosing her school] was one. Because I know her as a person, I know her character, I know her socially."

However, even though these mothers had contacts and used their knowledge and skills to help their daughters, they still struggled to find adequate resources. When I asked Shakira if she

knew anyone in the occupation to which her daughter aspired, she replied, “I don't know anyone per se. I have enough contacts where I could probably find one but I'm just so consumed with other things, between my job and the other kids I'm like okay I got to find time.” Similarly, several other mothers said they could not rely on the Internet to search for information to help their daughters plan because they did not know how to use the computer. But numerous mothers said their most pressing potential barrier would be finding the money they needed to help their daughters pay for their education. While Leslie insisted that all of her children would go to college, she also acknowledged her family would have difficulty paying for college. She said, “I will stand out there with a bucket, because my kid is going to college.” Cheri also did not know how she would pay for her daughter's future schooling and suggested that even though her job offered a college savings program she had not been able to take advantage of it.

Some of the mothers were fortunate to have extended family members and friends whom they said they could draw upon for information, knowledge, and financial assistance when they could not rely on themselves to provide information or financial assistance to their daughters. Kasey described how her grandparents often provided social and economic resources for the families, “When I was little they [her grandparents] pretty much raised me, like because my parents were really young. And they taught me like dinner manners and everything, so I've always been really close with them. And they do so many things for us. Like he [grandfather] took my nine year-old sister to a Rod Stewart concert today!” Kasey, who wanted to be a cosmetologist and/or possibly a crime scene investigator also said that her aunt registered her to participate in a program offered by a local police department to learn more about crime scene investigation. Trudy also relied on her parents “who live a block away,” to support her daughter financially and offer advice in her future planning. Trudy's sister and brother-in-law were also

physician's assistants and could provide her daughter with information and contacts to pursue her interest in medicine. Similarly, Leslie suggested that if her daughter needed information she could go to her father or uncle who both worked in the same field to which her daughter aspired. Because Leslie had these contacts, she felt that "It's pretty easy to get resources if you put your mind to it. Everybody knows a friend of a friend who knows this or does that. You just got to kind of dig around and ask around." Finally, Cheri said she could rely on her experiences helping her two other children through their education and one of them, who worked as an employment specialist and has access to career and job information as a resource, could help her daughter search for employment.

While many mothers articulated that family could provide additional knowledge and support, they most frequently said they would rely on extended family members for financial support. Leslie summarized mothers' economic need and their use of families as potential financial resources. She said, "Without a doubt, whatever we have to do we *will* do. Because of our family you know, whatever resources we have to pull from, we will pull from everybody."

Every mother who participated in the study viewed herself playing a primary role in helping their daughters reach their goals. However, oftentimes that role could only be one of emotional support because they did not always have the knowledge or access to the resources that they needed to plan. Some mothers were at times resourceful and at other times limited in the ways they could help their daughters plan and prepare. For example, Julie felt she supported her daughter in her academic and extracurricular endeavors by explaining, "Even though I'm not that, what do I want to say, famous on orchestra music, I still go to all her concerts. I show up at all of them." She also said that she "don't ask anyone for help" when her daughter chooses classes at school because she felt it was her daughter's responsibility to do so. Moreover, she

also said that if her daughter was to struggle in school, she would be sure to get her a tutor, “if her older brother couldn’t help.” She added, “I know I probably wouldn’t be able to help her. I would try but I doubt it, you know, because I never went to college or anything like that.” When asked how she would help her daughter reach her career goals (her daughter aspired to two different careers), she said she would talk to a friend who lives down the street who was working in the same field, but if her daughter chose a different field she said laughing, “I would not have the slightest idea [who to turn to].” Finally, even though Julie talked at length about the financial struggles she would face sending her daughter to college she said she was unsure if she would take advantage of a potential educational opportunity presented to her daughter that could afford her free tuition. She explained that her daughter had a chance to go to Indiana College because her husband had an aunt who was a professor there and who donated “all kinds of money” to the college. In return, the first girl in her family “would be able to go to school there for nothing,” although she concluded, “So if that’s true or not, I don’t know.” But she doubted, and did not protest, that her daughter would go to school there because “I don’t know if she wants to go that far away from her mom, that’s what she always tells me. So I don’t know if that will ever work or come about.” Julie’s interview exemplified the numerous contradictions many of the girls and their mothers faced in their ability to plan and prepare for the future. On one hand, they had support from extended family, and in Julie’s case, she had an older son who had been through the college application process. But as far as helping her daughter explore specific careers in areas of interest, Julie did not know how to do that. Moreover, Julie worked two jobs to make ends meet, and as a result found limited time to foster her daughter’s interest. She worried how she would pay for her daughter’s college, yet disregarded an opportunity to send her daughter to a college out of state for free because she wanted her daughter to stay close to home.

Beth also saw herself as providing emotional support and stability to her daughter as “one of the only families [she knew] that have two parents... sit down dinners... and traditions,” values that she felt enabled young people to “make it” and feel supported in life. Although in the past Beth suggested she was able to help her daughter with her school work and did so by “reading ahead of her and learning,” she no longer felt capable of helping her do homework. When it came to preparing her daughter for the future, her role as a mother seemed more supportive than practical. For instance, Beth spent much of her time helping her 19 year old daughter who had two children and keeping her 17 year old son on track in school. She tried to guide her younger daughter by teaching her to learn from the mistakes of her older siblings. Because she felt her oldest daughter wouldn’t “get real serious until she did a bunch of two bit jobs, flipping burgers,” she intended to teach her 13 year old daughter the same life lesson by not allowing her to go to college right after high school. She implied that she wanted her daughter to see how difficult it was to struggle in a low-wage job before she attended college so that she appreciated and took her education seriously. Moreover, while her daughter aspired to a highly professional career, she did not know anyone in that occupation with whom she could speak about the educational requirements. Wanting her daughter to wait a period of time before she attended college and not knowing anyone to explain the educational requirements to her, it was possible that Beth was unknowingly blocking her daughter from reaching her goals.

Kim also suggested that what she needed most to help her daughter reach her goals was the money to pay for college. Even though she was relying on her daughter getting scholarships, she says said she would get a loan if she had to or she could probably ask her parents and her uncle to help finance her daughter’s education. While Kim said money was her only struggle, she also seemed pretty overwhelmed during our interview (she had several phone calls and left

the room and came back once crying) and indicated having a hard time managing work, her own schooling, her children, and taking care of her parents. Referring to her stress, she said, “My parents and them, they um, I’m not the smartest child but, anytime they need something. I’m the one who does the friggin taxes. I’m the one who fills out the paperwork for the kids’ school. You know and, how do you do this, how do you do that. They all call on me. I don’t always know it. But I figure it out. Either I’ll look it up myself or I’ll call somebody and ask.” As she talked about how overwhelmed she was, she also prided herself on being able to find the resources she needed to help those around her, a skill that she said she would use when helping her daughter plan for the future. She reiterated, “I would ask somebody, even when I have problems with my physics, at my work we have pharmacists, we have all kinds of people with degrees. I’ll ask anybody who might know something. I’m not afraid to ask for help. I’ll ask or if I can’t figure it out, we’ll look online. Whatever we got to do to figure it out.” Moreover, she said she had a friend who was currently in the job to which her daughter aspired and while she did not know anyone in the legal system on a personal level (her daughter’s second occupational choice was to become a lawyer), her son’s father was involved with the legal system and the people who helped him could probably help her daughter if she had any questions about a career in the legal field.

Vivian talked more specifically than other mothers about having limited knowledge and resources, even though she was very familiar with community programs that help prepare young people for careers. She said that she knew “If you don’t have the resources you are gonna be lost,” and she shared her experiences trying to find programs to help her older daughter. She explained,

I went through that, it was like out there and I didn’t know and I would find out barely at the end that it was there and we would catch it. I wasn’t informed early

enough then by word of mouth and reading the paper and other people that has kids and different programs that they were in, and I was like OH let me try that and I would write down the number and I would call these people. So the knowledge is there you just have to go find it.

Vivian's daughter was involved in several community programs and a youth employment program and she rattled off the names of people who she knew in her community who were the "heads" of programs. She capitalized on these resources to help her children reach their goals and said that she frequently suggested to her daughter to "go to the library, get some different reading materials, get on the internet" to explore her interests. Moreover, she taught her daughter to take advantage of her experiences and the people she meets in these programs. She explained, "She went on a job tour last week and she was really impressed... I said, 'Did you get the number! You can contact them and even if it's two years down the line and you still need their assistance.' I said, 'Well keep your [business] cards from the people you meet when you are younger cause these are the people you still gonna be in contact with.'" The biggest problem Vivian felt she faced was that she did not feel her daughter was motivated enough to take advantage of these opportunities. She said, "She is young and she should be doing things. Instead, she acts like she is older than me," referring to her daughter sitting around the house.

Anita also admitted that she lacked the resources she needed to help her daughter plan, especially because she was a "recovering addict" and as she spent time rehabilitating, lost a lot of her own skills. However, she said she had family members who would provide the knowledge and information necessary to help her daughter plan for the future. Specifically, she said her daughter's two aunts worked at universities, and several of her cousins just graduated from college so "the college atmosphere is always around her." She concluded that she is "not afraid to ask questions, because I don't want her to be uneducated or not asking questions. So I will."

While some girls had strong support from their immediate and extended family members, many of their mothers were overwhelmed with work and family obligations, especially the single mothers, and many of their close and extended family members faced difficult barriers. This did not mean that the girls did not care about their futures or that their mothers did not care about helping them plan and prepare. But even girls from similar backgrounds vary in the amount and types of family resources they have.

Some mothers lacked the ability to influence their daughters' futures because they lacked the necessary resources. Still, they saw themselves as emotionally supporting their daughters even if they could not help with homework or by introducing them to someone in their career field of interest. As Tina said, "I will just make sure she gets a good education, encouraging and supporting her in any way I can." Tina acknowledged that the support she would provide her daughter would have more to do with emotional support than making practical education and career decisions. Instead, she referred her daughter to her teachers, "I know nothing nowadays about what they do in school. The only thing I could do, like I said, is call her teachers and do the tutoring thing [ask the school to assign her daughter a tutor]. I don't know anything else, except for the one you have to pay for, like that Sylvan Learning Center." Earlier in the conversation, Tina suggested her daughter was struggling in one of her subjects for the past two years. While her daughter was assigned a tutor, her grade had not improved. It is notable that Tina said she would utilize the services offered by Sylvan Learning Center "if she had to" yet two years had gone by and her daughter's grade did not improve, nor did she make contact to get her daughter help from the private Learning Center. Perhaps this was because of the expense. But Tina still felt that there was a value in the emotional support she provided her daughter. She explained,

When she was younger she wouldn't do it [ask teachers for help]. I said this is what we're paying the teachers for, to help you. If you don't understand what they're teaching, go ask them. Just say, 'You know what, I might be stupid or something but I don't get this.' You know, they'll sit down and they'll teach you. At least they'll try. And if they can't and you don't understand, at least they'll give you tutors which they've done.

Tina illustrated how some mothers were able to play an emotionally supportive role by talking to their daughters about difficult issues or struggles they face in education, but could not provide them with the practical support or expertise they needed to work through these issues.

African American mothers were more likely than white mothers to draw on community programs in which they and their daughters were involved as resources for current issues and future planning. These mothers said their participation in these programs was to remedy mistakes they had made, and to ensure their daughters would not make those mistakes. Mary regretted that she never earned her GED because she did not pass the test. She explained that she did not realize she could re-take the test and also missed that opportunity because "I had too much family problems going on." She explained the situation further, "I did go take my GED test and I missed like about 30 points. But I didn't know I could've went back and took it right then and there. So [the school] is closed now." She also explained that she was unsure of her own career goals so she was reluctant to pursue any kind of education. However, she added, "It seems that every time that I get myself set up then its like, they [her family] do something, something always comes up. I just lost mom last year. And then I've been having a lot of health problems and then my daughter and my other grandchildren. So it's been pretty hectic. But I know I got to start focusing on my self." Later in the interview Mary described growing up with a mother who was abusive and in an abusive relationship and she was "in and out of foster care."

She seemed to regret her own missed opportunities and hoped that her daughter would learn from her life experiences and “turn in the opposite direction.”

Despite Mary’s difficult childhood and inability to pursue her goals because of it, she was very resourceful when it came to her daughter. She enrolled her in a career-oriented charter school, a summer youth employment program, and an after school program. Mary learned about these community resources through a social worker who worked with her family and a parent of her daughter’s friend. She believed that these programs could provide her daughter with the resources that she could not provide.

Sylvia was quite similar to Mary in that throughout the interview she talked a lot about wanting to pursue her own goals but was unsure what she wanted to do. She explained, “I be wanting to do so many things at once, so like I said, start a child care [business] right now [in her home], court stenographer, I wanna go back to school for respiratory therapy, and I just I just finished school for carpentry.” Frustrated with her job, Sylvia wanted to make a career change, but was unsure of the direction in which she wanted to go. She utilized the services of community-based programs to help her explore these interests. Moreover, when it came to helping her daughter explore her education and career interests, because she did not know anyone directly and did not know how to find the resources herself, she hoped to draw on the services of these programs.

5.2.3 How Family Resources Matter

In this section, I began by showing how families structure their girls’ time and the ways girls describe how their families help them prepare and plan for the future. Some families structured their daily lives around the girls’ school and extracurricular activities and sought

activities in which their daughters could explore their interests. Mothers played a crucial role in organizing their children's days. In doing so, they were practicing what Annette Lareau (2003: 31) refers to as "concerted cultivation" or "an organization of leisure time orchestrated by adults" and the "fostering of their child's talents and skills." Concerted cultivation benefits these girls in that they are in sync with school values, i.e., learning, getting involved in activities, working hard in school, and they experience a range of activities to explore their interests. Other girls also spent a lot of time with family members but did so more leisurely. They bonded by watching television, sharing family dinners, and hanging out with family. Some of these girls had brothers, cousins, or aunts and uncles who had experiences in education or their fields of interest and could offer practical advice. On the other hand, these same families faced difficult barriers with unexpected pregnancies and delinquency and admitted financial strain. This meant that parents, especially mothers, were often too busy to research resources for their girls. They could provide emotional support but had difficulty providing practical resources. Finally, other girls also had emotionally supportive family members but these family members faced difficult health, drug and alcohol, and other barriers that made it difficult for them to help their daughters plan. Moreover, these girls' mothers were the least resourceful and said that it was their daughters' responsibilities to find the career planning resources that they could not provide. Providing only limited practical support in helping their daughters prepare for the future limits these girls' ability to reach their goals.

This section illustrates that although the girls have similar economic backgrounds, their family members, especially their mothers, have varying amounts and types of resources and barriers that are likely to set the girls onto different paths as they explore their interests and begin to make educational and career decisions. In the next section, I show how girls and mothers

perceived schools as resources. I suggest that like familial resources, school resources can set girls onto different paths as they plan for their futures.

5.3 SCHOOL RESOURCES

For poor and working class girls, enjoying learning and having positive relationships with teachers and other school personnel is important as they plan for their futures. In families where girls do not have parents or other adults in professional jobs, school can connect girls with information, experiences, and people in their fields of interest. Not all of the girls in this study had positive attitudes and orientations toward school. Some were very excited about learning and the ways their teachers challenged them while others argued with teachers and did not see them as a resource. In this section I show that whether or not girls and mothers view the school as a resource can push girls into different directions as they prepare for the future. I first describe the girls' attitudes toward schooling and show that those who had positive attitudes toward school were likely to view the school positively in helping them reach their goals and used the school as a resource. Next, I discuss girls' relationships with teachers and show that those who had positive relationships with their teachers were likely to see them as a resource. In the final section, I discuss mothers' opinions of their girls schooling as well as the messages they tell their daughters about school and suggest that mothers' experiences and resulting feelings about the schools are likely to be transmitted to the girls and influence their interactions with teachers and willingness to seek resources from them.

5.3.1 Girls' Attitudes Toward School

Some of the girls seemed well attuned to the ways that involving themselves in educational and academic activities were likely to foster their intellectual capabilities and future opportunities. For example, several were enrolled in Advanced Placement courses and two described themselves as “4.0 students.” These girls knew high academic scores were directly related to their future careers and that they needed good grades in subjects that were prerequisites for their future careers. Adriana knew she needed to “pay close attention in math and science” because they were directly related to her career in medicine. Similarly, Amanda suggested that she would take courses that benefited her, not the courses her friends were taking, as some other girls suggested. She said, “For next year I scheduled the classes that would help me, not classes that I could have with my friends.” Danae and Adriana also developed their own cultural capital by spending a lot of their free time reading novels and Danae also explored her interests in music. When I asked her what kind of special gifts or talents she possessed she said, “Well actually mostly everything I do has some kind of talent but, you know, not that of an expert. Like I can draw well, I can sing well, I can play the piano well, I can play the violin, the flute. I’m learning the guitar. I catch on quickly to anything that I really do.”

A small number of girls were excited about the challenging learning opportunities that school provided. Danae illustrated these girls’ excitement when she went into great detail to explain a group project called a “thinkathon” in which she was involved,

You have to make an art piece, a drama skit and nuts and bolts, which is just, you know, plain math and, you know, brain teasers – the whole thing is made out of brain teasers. And the art has to be a pop-up book. And everything has— Well the art and the drama piece have to do with the five senses or humor or whatever sense like common sense, the third eye or like seeing into the future.

Like Danae, Adriana, also enjoyed “the challenge of going to school everyday and having the teachers give us new work and stuff like that.” Other girls like Amanda and Kasey loved school and identified as “nerds” and wanted to “learn, learn, learn” so as not to, in Amanda’s words, “go in there looking like a total moron.” These girls touted their high academic standing and said they enjoyed school.

Alexa and Rebecca also thrived on the challenges that school provided and were heavily engaged in their school work however, they both expressed concern about their education because they attended a school where they encountered unsafe conditions. Alexa was discontented with school because it was unsafe. She said that as an adult she would like to live in a “safe neighborhood, so my kids could go to a private school” and said her mother doesn’t want her to go to the high school she would be filtered into because “there’s like too many drugs and stuff there and its just gotten so bad. She doesn’t want me to be around that.”

Other girls had ambiguous attitudes toward school suggesting they did not like school or only did so because they were able to “hang out” with their friends. After school was the highlight of their day when they “walked around the neighborhood,” “went to the mall,” or “hung out at” their friend’s houses. For these girls, peer influences were much stronger than their excitement of challenging educational activities. Many of the girls who did not like school also had difficult relationships with their teachers, a topic to which I now turn.

5.3.2 Girls’ Relationships with Teachers

Several girls had positive and trusting relationships with their teachers and suggested they felt comfortable going to teachers and/or guidance counselors to ask questions about their goals in addition to talking to them when they had personal struggles. Danae placed a high value on

being able to talk to teachers who “wouldn’t tell everyone your secrets,” and Adriana felt close to her teachers because she spent everyday with them and “you get used to being able to talk to them and they won’t tell everyone what you said.” These girls enjoyed close relationships with their teachers.

Many of the girls who enjoyed school and their teachers were also involved in numerous after school activities. Kasey described her heavy involvement in after school programs by stating, “I am a cheerleader, I play softball, I’m on the student news, editor of the newspaper and the yearbook. Oh, and I am in a youth group in my church.” Similarly, Amanda was involved in the youth group at her church as well as chorus, softball, and volleyball. Adriana played volleyball and softball whereas Natasha played basketball, was heavily involved in her youth group, and sang in the church choir. While Danae didn’t play sports, she was involved in programs after school including “thinkathon” and music lessons.

Other girls did not have consistently positive relationships with their schools. These girls struggled with negative interactions with teachers and were not as involved in school activities so they spent more time outside of school “hanging out with peers” or by themselves. Kyra, Ebony, and Keyanna, all African American, felt disconnected from school and were not involved in school activities. Kyra said she did not really like her teachers because “some of the teachers have smart mouths and I like to get smart back with them but, unfortunately we can’t and we are always the ones that end up wrong.” Suggesting she did not feel connected to school, Kyra said “I was in stage crew, I was in chorus, but I am not now.” Kyra, Ebony, and Keyanna were not involved in school activities but did attend a community-based program after school in which they participated in golf, workshops on healthy living and self-esteem, career exploration, and computers. However, these programs only occurred twice a week and so the girls were left with

a lot of unstructured time after school. When I asked them what they did during days they were not attending their community program they said they usually watched television or talked on the phone. Other African American girls, who participated in after school programs, shared these girls' positive attitudes towards them. Amber felt supported both academically and personally by the tutor offered in her after school program as well as a staff member there. This particular staff member, Miss Jade, was mentioned by several of the girls as who they would go to for advice about school and life. Moreover, the African American girls participating in these programs frequently talked about education and career exploration activities provided to them through community-based and after school programs, which they said they did not receive in school.

A small number of girls said they did not like school at all and had difficult relationships with their teachers and indifferent to school rules. Elaina said she was having a difficult time in Algebra and having Spanish class at the beginning of the day “completely ruins” her day because she “hates” her teacher. Similarly, Katrina described school as “hard” and “boring” and talked a lot about needing to try harder to be successful. Likewise, Amber described her discontent with the close monitoring and surveillance in her school when she likened her school to “a jail.” These girls did not perceive the school or personnel as resources but were more likely to say they would go to teachers “If I had to.” Elaina and Rachel said neither they nor their peers went to teachers to discuss things like course selection or career exploration. Danielle said that she did not usually talk to teachers about taking classes or her career goals, even though she admittedly enjoyed school and learning. However, Danielle’s social class background gives insight to her ambiguity with school as she said she did not do well in her English class because she lacked the resources required to complete her course requirements. She said,

For the most part I do [well in school]. The only reason I don't do good in English is because I don't have a computer. And every copy we had to do a rough draft and everything had to be typed. And I couldn't get it typed and that would make me lose points. But for the most part yeah, I do decent in school. I'm like an average student.

Destiny was career-aware and oriented but lacked support and interest from her mother, had limited people from whom to draw upon for career information and resources, and felt a tension in meeting some of her school requirements because she did not have a computer to do so. Her lack of resources in home and the school contributed to her sense of not doing well in English.

Mothers' attitudes and messages about school were likely to contribute to the girls' attitudes toward schooling. In the next section, I discuss how mothers' influenced girls' likeliness of seeing school and teachers as resources.

5.3.3 Mothers' Attitude Toward Schooling

A mother's attitude toward her daughter's schooling is likely to influence her daughters' perceptions of school as a resource. Yet not all of the mothers in this study had positive attitudes toward their daughters' schooling. While several mothers were proud of their daughters' accomplishments and suggested they had good relationships with school personnel, others did not see the school as a resource and in some cases, criticized the competency of the school.

Several mothers, in communicating with the teachers, were told that their daughters were "exceptional," "respectful and well respected," and that "the teachers love her." They drew on teachers and guidance counselors to help them help their daughters prepare. Barb, who worked at a school, said she would have no problem working with the guidance office to help her daughter plan because she was close friends with several of the counselors. Leslie also felt comfortable calling the guidance counselor at her daughter's school to answer current questions

and to help her daughter make education and career decisions. Cheri said her daughters' teachers notified her when her grades were slipping and she worked "together with the teachers" to help her daughter better manage her time. Finally, Kim spoke positively about a principal in her daughter's school and believed that teachers would play the biggest role in preparing her daughter for the future.

Other mothers used the school for support, but to a limited extent. Tina relied on the school to help her daughter who was having trouble in algebra. She summarized the situation, "I told her, I really can't help you. You have to do it, and I even called the school and talked to her teachers saying that, she's really having problems with this, could you help her out? And they'll try to sit down like after class, or make a special, she even had tutors and stuff." However, Tina was unsure if she would go to the school for help in finding information about her daughter's future career. She said she would "probably call the guidance counselor," but then quickly said she would tell her daughter to speak to the guidance counselor first and "then if I didn't get the satisfactory answer, then I would probably call." Tina's suggestion to make the effort if she had to was much different from other mothers' who personally knew guidance counselors and would feel confident in going to them for help. Amy also said that she might go to her daughter's guidance counselor for information about planning her future but it was really "up to her [daughter]" to find the resources she needs." Moreover, she said she currently only "talk[s] to teachers when I have to" and believed it would only be necessary to talk to anyone at the school if she had a problem.

Several mothers criticized their daughters' school practices. When I asked Julie if her daughter's teachers could be helpful in shaping her future she replied, "They can be. A lot of teachers can be real helpful. Some are quite miserable and wouldn't even consider helping a

kid.” Beth was also critical of her daughter’s schooling. First, she said that everyone at the school knew who she was, “including the school guards.” Then she indicated that she was heavily involved in her children’s schooling, and was especially attuned to the curriculum, which she condemned. She was upset that the school “changed the way they teach math” which she did not think was benefiting the students, and she disagreed with the amount of pressure they put on the students in reading, requiring them to “read 25 books a year,” which only accounted for “25% of their grade.” She said that students did not want to read that much and “if your kid won’t read a book, what do you do? Do you let them go through pressure? Do you let them flunk in school? Do you force them till they cry and hate it?” She had her own solution. She said, “No you cut out magazine articles. You buy them magazine articles about boys. They like boys. About clothes. I went and bought her [daughter] *Seventeen* magazine. I have them read the cereal boxes.” She also thought the books they provided for reading were “boring” and that students did not want to learn classical poetry. Instead, “why can’t they let them go download their favorite song, the lyrics are poetry.” She concluded that if schools “don’t make learning fun, students will fail. That’s why they are losing kids.”

It was not just the curriculum that Beth criticized. She also said her daughter is “scared to death” to attend her high school because it is “getting sucky, worse year by year.” She explained that the school used to be a “good school” and is now overcrowded because of neighboring schools being closed. “Now they are having problems and wonder why?” Answering her own question, she said,

You can’t put a bunch of hormone infested teenagers together. They think that’s saving money because they don’t have to buy two teachers when they can pay for one. Then they go into the classroom, spend 30 minutes saying shut up and put that away, and 10 minutes teaching something that nobody hears because there’s still screaming going on... That’s why if she don’t get everything she needs by

the first two years of high school, she won't get anything. Because 11th and 12th grade is a joke at that high school. I've sat in on the classes.

Beth expressed a clear discontent with the curriculum at her daughter's school as well as how the student body was managed.

Mary's relationship with her daughter's school was also ambiguous. She really liked her daughter's school because being a career-oriented charter school, she felt her daughter would have access to information and resources to put her on a path toward a successful future. However, she also described a negative interaction with the school that left her feeling somewhat dissatisfied with the teachers. She explained that her daughter's teacher called their home to speak with her daughter about "the do's and don'ts of the program," and instead of talking to her, she specifically asked for her daughter. When Mary told the teacher she could talk to her instead of her daughter, the teacher insisted on talking to her daughter instead of Mary. Upset, Mary said, "I thought the way that she called and the way she handled it, she could have handled it in a better manner, you know. Because she's 14. I understand that you're teaching them to be responsible up there but you can talk to me." While Mary thought her daughter's current school was the best school for her, she also worried that the district superintendent was going to close it down. As she described, "It would be a crime to let them close it down. Why send them into these gang banging schools where they got guns and all that? You know that is my fear." Mary made a concerted effort to get her daughter out of a potentially dangerous school where she knew she would not thrive but her efforts might be undermined due to circumstances out of her control.

Sylvia also turned to her daughter's school to provide her with the information and resources she needed to reach her goals but did not get the results she was looking for. Her

daughter's grades were decreasing and because the school did not help her daughter, she turned to the community-based program in which her daughter was involved. She explained,

It's so hard to find, I never realized how hard it was to find a tutor in Pittsburgh schools. It's like when you are crying out for help, there is nobody there, but if your child is bad, they find you real fast. So I was calling the school, asked for a tutor, seeing, I mean, for like years then they finally, recently they just like, maybe a year ago, I found the after school program and then they provided a tutor to help her with her math.

Perhaps this experience contributed to Sylvia's uncertainty in using the school as a resource.

Some mothers had very positive feelings about their daughter's schooling and as a result felt confident in going to the school for resources and motivating their daughters' to use the school as a resource. These mothers were teaching their girls the importance of participating in school activities, sharing personal tribulations with teachers, and to use the school to help them reach their goals. Other mothers criticized teachers, the curriculum, and had negative interactions with schools. These experiences and resulting feelings about the schools are likely to be transmitted to the girls and influence their interactions with teachers as well as their willingness to seek resources from them.

5.3.4 How School Resources Matter

In this section I showed that not all of the girls had positive attitudes toward school and that their feelings about school, especially their teachers, influenced whether or not they viewed school as a resource for planning for their futures. Some girls welcomed the challenges their teachers brought on, others had difficult and conflictual relationships with their teachers, and a number of girls struggled with difficult relationships with teachers and trying to learn in overcrowded and unsafe schools. All of these girls came from similar economic backgrounds,

but they did not share the same experiences or relationships with schooling nor did they see the school as a resource in the same way. For poor and working class girls, viewing the school as a resource and taking advantage of the opportunities schools provide can supplement information provided by families. Learning to see and use teachers for resources also teaches girls a lifelong lesson of formulating networks to help them reach their goals. Moreover, the girls who had mothers who felt connected to the school, viewed and used the school as a resource, and were confident in the school's abilities to guide them helped build girls social and cultural capital. But not all of the girls in this study had these relationships with schools. Other girls felt disconnected, did not do well, only enjoyed school so they could be with their friends, were disengaged, and their mothers mistrusted and/or were critical of the girls' schooling. In many cases this was because the schools they attended were overcrowded and unsafe. Perhaps under these conditions, they had difficulty connecting with teachers who may have been handling disciplinary issues, too many students, or other poor teaching conditions. Without positive relations with schools, these girls will have difficulty finding information and resources especially given their families cannot provide them.

I conclude this chapter by summarizing the varying levels of resources girls find themselves and within their families and schools that prepare them for the future. I show how for poor and working class girls, resources can contribute to girls' career preparedness in different ways and thus set them onto different paths in realizing their goals.

5.4 GIRLS' VARYING RESOURCES

In this section, I use a typology to illustrate that poor and working class girls have different types and forms of resources to plan for their futures. This typology demonstrates that neither class nor race fully explains how girls are setting off to realize their aspirations because as the table shows, girls from within the same class categories (poor, working poor, or working class) and racial categories (white or black) have different levels of career preparedness. The typology also shows that level of aspiration does not matter. Girls with high aspirations may have low career preparedness and girls with low aspirations may be setting off to be highly prepared. It is important to look to the patterns of difference in the resources girls find and activate themselves and the resources families and schools provide to understand how girls, who share similar backgrounds, will realize their future goals.

Table 5.1 summarizes and distinguishes between the resources that contribute to the career preparedness of poor and working class girls. “Career Oriented” resources include positive self-images, resourcefulness, positive dispositions toward the future, academically successful friends, high parental involvement in career planning, extended family members who can offer resources, positive relations with teachers, and positive experiences at school. “Career Conflicted” resources include limited resourcefulness, ambiguous dispositions toward the future, less academically inclined friends, difficult familial barriers, and mixed emotions toward schooling and teachers. “Career Inhibited” resources include negative self-images, bleak dispositions toward the future, ambiguity about career planning resources, negative peer influences, numerous and difficult familial barriers, and negative impressions of and interactions with schools.

Table 5-1: Resources That Contribute to Girls Career Preparedness

	Girls resourcefulness, dispositions, and motivation	Family Resources	School Resources
Career Oriented	<p>Talked positively about themselves and abilities</p> <p>Set goals and had plans for attaining those goals</p> <p>Believed they could reach their goals</p> <p>Were familiar with education necessary to reach career goals</p> <p>Possessed knowledge of skills, duties, and workplaces in their fields of interest</p> <p>Took courses and were involved in activities that fostered their interests</p> <p>Purposefully chose academically inclined friends</p>	<p>Structured familial activities and daily life around girls' education and extracurricular activities</p> <p>Cultivated educational and extracurricular opportunities and fostered girls' interests</p> <p>Parents talked with daughters about their futures</p> <p>Some mothers had knowledge and personal contacts in girls fields of interest</p> <p>Faced economic challenges but not familial barriers such as divorce, drug abuse, or delinquency</p> <p>Extended family members provided economic support and career information and educational opportunities</p>	<p>Enjoyed school</p> <p>Earned good grades</p> <p>Saw a connection between school and future careers</p> <p>Participated in Advanced Placement and juggled numerous extracurricular educational activities</p> <p>Respected and trusted teachers, welcomed their challenges</p> <p>Mothers talked positively about school and felt comfortable drawing on school for resources</p>
Career Conflicted	<p>Talked positively about self mixed with acknowledgements of poor behavior, "smart mouths," and lack of confidence</p> <p>Possessed some knowledge of education requirements but were uncertain they were motivated to achieve them</p> <p>Possessed minimal knowledge of skills, duties, and workplaces in their fields of interests and referred to inadequate resources for help, i.e., Google and AskJeeves</p> <p>Influenced negatively by popularity and boys, struggled with peer pressure and friends getting into trouble</p>	<p>Family time spent on leisure activities</p> <p>Family lacked economic resources</p> <p>Brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, and uncles faced drug addiction, delinquency, unexpected pregnancy</p> <p>Mothers provided emotional support but could not provide practical guidance</p> <p>Some extended family members could provide educational and career guidance</p>	<p>Enjoyed school</p> <p>Above academic proficiency</p> <p>Had some involvement in after school and community programs</p> <p>Motivated to go to school to see friends</p> <p>Some spoke of unsafe schools and neighborhoods</p> <p>Ambiguous relationships with school personnel</p> <p>Mothers critical of curriculum and teachers, saw school as disciplinarian, and felt ambiguous about using school as a resource</p>
Career Inhibited	<p>Talked negatively about self, abilities, and future</p> <p>Unsure and overwhelmed by steps to reach their goals and reverted to hard work and motivation rhetoric as</p>	<p>Family time limited, reported spending more time with peers</p> <p>Mothers lacked knowledge, skills, and resources to help girls plan and said girls needed to find their own</p>	<p>Performed poorly in subjects</p> <p>Disliked teachers and/or did not view them as resources</p> <p>Objected to school rules</p>

	<p>solutions</p> <p>Girls and friends had unexpected pregnancies which they acknowledged inhibited their futures</p> <p>Negatively influenced by peers by skipping classes and getting suspended, parents did not like their choices in peers</p>	<p>resources but were emotionally supportive</p> <p>Several girls said mothers did not care about their futures</p> <p>Immediate family members suffered from illness, unexpected pregnancy, delinquency, and/or drug and alcohol addictions</p> <p>Four mothers recovering drug/alcohol addicts</p> <p>Mothers lacked time to participate in study</p>	<p>Were in trouble at school, i.e., fighting, detention, suspension</p> <p>Mothers viewed school as primarily responsible for daughters' futures because they lacked knowledge necessary to guide them</p>
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The resources that differentiate how girls from similar backgrounds plan for and are being prepared for the future are illustrated in Table 5.1 and illustrate how girls from similar backgrounds are set onto different paths.

In Table 5.2, I put each girl from this study into one of the career preparedness categories described in Table 5.1. I found it difficult to group the girls into these categories because as Lillian Rubin (1992: 30) states, typologies are “at best, only an approximation of reality.” Yet in doing so, I show that girls career preparedness is not simply a reflection of their social class, race, or level of aspiration.

Table 5-2: Girls' Career Preparedness

	Race	Social Class	Aspiration	Aspiration Level
Career Oriented				
Adriana	White	Working class	Doctor	High
Amanda	White	Working class	Entrepreneur	High
Kasey	White	Working class	Cosmetologist/crime scene investigator	Low/High
Natasha	African American	Working class	WNBA player	High
Danae	African American	Working class	Veterinarian	High
Career Conflicted				
Jessica	White	Working poor	Actress/photographer /physical therapist	High
Rebecca	White	Working class	Dentist	High
Kassidy	White	Working class	Cosmetologist	Low
Alexa	White	Working poor	Lawyer/computer technician	High
Ebony	African American	Working poor	Criminal lawyer	High
Brittany	African American	Poor	Cosmetologist/singer	Low/High
Kyra	African American	Poor	Pediatrician	High
Keyanna	African American	Working class	Psychologist	High
Career Inhibited				
Danielle	White	Working poor	Social worker/forensic scientist	High
Elaina	White	Working class	Social worker	High
Randi	White	Working class	Pharmacist/unsure	High
Star	Bi-racial	Poor	Cosmetologist	Low
Amber	African American	Working poor	Veterinarian	High
Jamyra	African American	Poor	Pediatrician	High
Charity	African American	Working poor	Cosmetologist	Low
Katrina	African American	Working poor	Undecided	NA
Serena	African American	Working poor	Cosmetologist	Low

As the table suggests, homogenizing poor and working class girls' experiences is faulty because they differ in the resources they find among themselves in their families and schools. Of the 22 girls interviewed, five working class girls (three white, two African American, aspiring to both high and low level careers) possessed and activated many Career Orienting resources.

These girls were resourceful, had positive dispositions toward their futures, were motivated and planning for their futures, and found resources among their families and schools. Three working class (two white, one African American), two working poor (one white, one African American), and two poor girls (both African American) possessed and activated some resources but also struggled to find resources themselves and within their families and schools; their resources were Conflicting. While they aspired to both high and low level careers, they were ambiguous about where to obtain the information they needed to plan their careers, their families could only provide a minimal level of practical resources for planning, and they were often at odds with school personnel and influenced negatively by peers. Finally, two working class (both white), four working poor (all African American), and two poor girls (one bi-racial and one African American) lacked resources and the knowledge of where to find them, had bleak dispositions toward the future, chose peers who negatively influenced them, had family members, especially mothers who suffered from difficult barriers, and did not find resources within their schools. Their lack of resources inhibited their career planning (Career Inhibited). These girls aspired to both high and low level careers. As this table illustrates, girls' resources impact their level of career preparedness. These resources are not determined by social class, race, or level of aspiration, instead, girls find different resources among themselves and within their families and schools.

5.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I examined how girls are realizing their goals. I showed that among themselves and within their families and schools, girls have different resources that are likely to

set them onto different paths. Some girls have resources that orient them toward reaching their goals (Career Oriented) and seek people and information that they need to make future plans. They also have positive dispositions toward the future and align themselves with academically successful friends. Their families, especially their mothers, structure their time around schooling and other activities that foster social and cultural capital necessary for their future planning. Career Oriented girls also enjoy school, accept the challenges posed by their teachers, and perceive schools and teachers as resources. Other girls (Career Conflicted) were at times, positive about themselves and their futures, but struggled with being motivated to reach their goals, finding adequate career planning resources, and being influenced by negative peer pressure and boys. They had close familial relationships but their families did not spend time together fostering girls' interests and capital. They liked school, mostly because they were able to see their friends, not because they had close relationships with their teachers. They were not as likely as the Career Oriented girls to see the school or teachers as a resource. Finally, a number of girls (Career Inhibited) often struggled to talk positively about themselves and their dispositions toward the future were pessimistic. They lacked the resources they needed to plan and did not know where to get adequate information about their future careers. They were often influenced by their friends, with whom they got into trouble, and struggled academically. While their families may have provided them emotional support, they struggled with difficult barriers that prevented them from investing in their daughters' education and career planning. This was evident in the small number of these girls' mothers who participated in this study. Nor were these girls fond of school and as a result, they did not see the school or their teachers as a resource.

I began this study by suggesting that understanding how the intersections of gender, social class, and race helps to see how the patterns of gender, class, and raced based practices in the media, families, and schools help shape who the girls are and who they want to become. When I examined how girls are reaching their goals, I suggested that homogenizing girls' experiences only tells part of the story. Girls who share similar backgrounds also differ greatly in the amounts and types of resources they have among themselves and within their families and schools. These resources set some girls onto more positive and hopeful paths than others. By constructing a typology that highlights these resources, I illustrated that social class, race, and level of aspiration do not divide these girls, but instead, individual practices among girls and within their families and schools set them onto different paths.

6.0 SHAPING THE FUTURES OF POOR AND WORKING CLASS GIRLS

In this project I examined how poor and working class, African American and white girls in Southwestern Pennsylvania perceive their futures. I showed that career aspirations are shaped in the contexts of daily life, interactions, and institutional and cultural milieu. Girls and their mothers internalize success and failure and are rarely critical of how gender, social class, and racial positions set them onto similar paths as they plan and prepare for the future. Yet, they have no language to attribute success and failure to gender, class, and race because American ideals, as well as the rhetoric of *Girl Power* and *Mean Girl*, teach them to be personally responsible. I also showed that social class, race, and level of aspiration are not the only factors that influence girls' aspirations. Among themselves and within their families and schools, girls find, possess, and activate varying resources that set them onto different paths in reaching their goals.

This dissertation has both theoretical and practical uses. Theoretically, I contribute to girls' studies scholarship that examines how girls take on and resist cultural constructions of girlhood. I respond to the call from girls' studies scholars who suggest that girls from different race and class backgrounds experience life differently. My research supports this claim; however, I also find that girls from similar backgrounds do not have the same experiences when preparing for their futures. I also contribute to social reproduction theories by separating how girls activate forms of social and cultural capital not provided by their mothers. This work also

has practical implications. Focusing on how aspirations are formed, rather than the aspirations themselves, has practical uses for policymakers who establish guidelines for youth employment programs. Analyzing the processes of youth aspiration formation will help youth service providers, schools, and parents shape ideas and connect girls to the resources they need to be successful. Finally, this work is useful for poor and working class girls who to understand that social position matters in how their futures are shaped, that success and failure require more than individual effort, and that family, community, and institutional support is necessary ensure their success.

6.1 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This dissertation contributes to the work of girls' studies scholars who critique constructions of girlhood that incorporate traditional images of femininity and newer "*Girl Power*" and "*Mean Girl*" rhetoric. I also challenge these constructions but then show how poor and working class girls take up and resist them, which researchers have not yet done. These images represent individualistic factors which assume all girls have the same choice to fulfill their dreams and detract focus from structural influences, such as class and race. I expand structural explanations of career aspirations when I examine how gender, social class, and race influence girls' sense of self and their futures and explain how subtle factors and resources present in their lives set girls from similar backgrounds on to different paths. In doing so, I examine "how patterns of difference and inequality" are different for poor and working class girls in this particular historical time (MacLeod and Yates, 2006: 92). Here I extend social reproduction theories because I analyze the experiences of poor and working class girls, not

boys, who historically have been the focus of reproduction studies, and pay attention to how these girls are situated differently than boys in global capitalist society as workforce opportunities become increasingly available and they negotiate work and balancing work and family. I also prioritize mothers' influence over girls' futures instead of focusing on fathers' educational and occupational experiences, as past studies of reproduction tend to do. Mothers are girls' primary sources of career information and teach their girls significant lessons about balancing work and family. From mothers, girls learn that they will have to work and that they will be primarily responsible for the well-being of their immediate and extended families. Finally, in the tradition of feminist studies, I highlight girls' agency in resisting often troubling gender, race, and class-related circumstances, and creating and activating their own forms of capital to pursue their goals. This is different from other explanations of social reproduction because it focuses on the standpoint of girls.

6.1.1 Girls' Studies

Since the early 1990's increasing attention has been paid to the plights of girls in both public and academic realms. However, girls' studies as a formal academic field, is more recent. In a short time, Girls' Studies has contributed to media, education, and youth development theories through a focus on the gendered nature of girls' experiences and understanding how intersectionality contributes to these experiences.

While this study aimed to capture the experiences of poor and working class girls in the Pittsburgh region, I frame these experiences in a larger cultural context to understand how contemporary cultural images of girlhood impact girls' everyday lives and futures. Debates about gender differences and equality in adolescence have been plentiful in American history, as

girls and boys have been constantly pitted against one another, but more recent discourses of girlhood have changed girlhood in American society. *Girl Power* and *Mean/Bad/Violent Girl* images dichotomize girls. *Girl Power* suggests that girls are independent, empowered, and self-sufficient and we no longer need worry about them; they are reaping the successes of the feminist movement. The *Mean/Bad/Violent Girl* images suggest girls are in trouble as they assert themselves, act more like boys, and emotionally and physically fight for power. Both of these images draw on traditional notions of femininity, both warn girls not to overstep their boundaries, and both are inaccurate portrayals of what it means to be a girl today. These discourses ultimately encourage girls to be “personally responsible” and “self-making” citizens in a global capitalist society fulfilling labor force needs, consuming, and reinventing themselves to meet economic needs. However, as I illustrated, girls take on and resist both of these images and their social positions enable and disable them to differentially negotiate the expectations of these constructed identities. The poor and working class girls in this study illustrate the inaccuracies of *Girl Power* and *Mean Girl* rhetoric which individualizes and results in increased surveillance and monitoring over their behaviors. Moreover, this rhetoric especially inhibits poor and working class girls from being able to self-actualize.

I also show that the complexities of class and racial difference as well as how these differences shape unequal opportunities and outcomes for girls are often ignored in popular understandings of girlhood and by girls and mothers. *Mean Girls* are rich, white and entitled. Empowered girls are white and privileged. While these girls also benefit from social service agencies programs and policies designed to help underprivileged girls, homogenize them based on race and class, e.g. conflating minority race with lower socio-economic class. Moreover, I show that in addition to not homogenizing the girl experience, one cannot homogenize the

experiences of poor and working class girls. Even when girls share similar backgrounds, they do not have the same experiences, nor do they share the same levels of social and cultural capital.

6.1.2 Social Reproduction Theory

This project contributes to the work of social reproduction theories by examining the experiences of girls, which have been historically left out of these studies. Women's roles in paid and unpaid work are ever-changing in a global capitalist economy, and girls today will not have the same experiences as their mothers. Poor and working class girls are expected to work and contribute to family income and are expected to be primarily responsible for child care and the care of extended family members. These expectations starkly turn away from the girl empowered image which suggests that girls today are free to achieve their career dreams. The realities of poor and working class girls also challenge the "helping" rhetoric of policy makers, career counselors, and social service providers who suggest that girls should turn away from their families to achieve their own goals. Helping professionals need to acknowledge the responsibility that girls have to care for their families.

Moreover, most reproduction studies focus on fathers' education and occupational levels as a measure of the amount and forms of economic, social, and cultural capital yielded for children. By examining mothers' forms and activation of capital, I extend reproduction theory. Mothers are girls primary source of career information. Yet mothers often lack the information they need to help their girls reach their goals. I found that mothers create their own forms of capital by gathering information from teachers and more often from family members and other mothers. But more institutionalized forms of support need to be in place for mothers to help their daughters. In addition, by focusing on how girls make sense of their material position,

perceive the possible outcomes of their material conditions, and create and activate their own forms of capital, I show that reproduction is not solely determined by parental status.

I also show how American ideals are adopted by girls and mothers despite their lower economic status. The girls and mothers relied on a sense that hard work and individual motivation would pay off. They did not critically examine their own disadvantages and the ways these disadvantages block people from being socially mobile. Moreover, many believed that being female did not pose barriers in pursuing their goals. In terms of race, several white mothers felt their children were at a disadvantage because affirmative action programs would afford African Americans more opportunities than their children would receive. Several African American mothers, who experienced racism in education and work, did not teach their daughters that race matters. These findings illustrate that girls are not learning about structural barriers that impede their success.

I also found that economic, social, and cultural capital operates differently for these girls, not only compared to their middle class counterparts but also among the girls in this study. Mothers worried about money and transmitted these worries to their daughters. Unlike middle class girls, these girls had a sense of their family's economic struggles and knew they would have to contribute financially to their education. Yet while all mothers repeatedly discussed financial struggles, some said they would rely on extended family members or seek loans to help pay for their daughters' education. Not all mothers could rely on these extended networks for financial support. Mothers also sought ways to compensate for their lack of economic capital. All mothers relied on extended family for social support but only some mothers had networks of people who they relied on for information and resources (social capital) to help their daughters reach their goals. Extended family members and friends who worked in the school and in

community programs often helped these mothers help their daughters make decisions and gather information. However, fewer mothers knew people in the jobs to which their daughters aspired. Their social networks, while helpful in making everyday decisions around school and extracurricular activities, were not as advantageous as the networks possessed by middle class mothers who are likely to know friends and family members who went to college and occupied a variety of professional careers.

Finally, in terms of cultural capital, I showed that, like middle class parents, these girls' parents were instilling an assumption that going to college was important and necessary. However, middle class parents, because of their own education and work experiences, know what their children need to do to achieve and use this knowledge to help their children advance in the education system, find opportunities to foster their interests, develop their children's intellectuality, and monitor their schooling. Some of the mothers in this study did find educational activities in which to enroll their daughters and foster their interests. They were seeking scholarship information, encouraging reading, enrolling their daughters in extracurricular activities, ensuring their daughters were placed in Advanced Placement courses, and choosing academically sound high schools for their daughters. Many mothers however, lacked the knowledge and resources necessary to offer this cultural capital. Instead, they saw themselves as emotionally supporting their girls and left finding resources up to their daughters. Many of the girls took advantage of activities and opportunities offered by their schools and after school programs and formed tight relationships with teachers. In doing so, they fostered their own social and cultural capital. But not all schools offered these opportunities and not all girls felt connected enough to their schools to take advantage of them. As illustrated, social class and race alone do not fully explain the disadvantages in reaching one's future as experienced by poor

and working class girls. Instead, these girls differentially developed resources and found knowledge and information on their own as well as through their families and schools.

6.2 PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

When I share the findings of this study with policymakers, program providers, teachers, and members of the general public, they often assume I have uncovered a solution about the social and economic mobility of girls. That is, they ask how we can “get girls out of the ghetto” or what helps kids defy the odds of their poor backgrounds. This is problematic for a two reasons. First, it implies that changing girls-one girl at a time- instead of changing the gendered, classed, and raced, cultural and institutional milieu they inhabit will make girls successful. Second, it negates the communal and familial values prevalent in poor and working class communities.

Cultural discourses of the successful girl arise out of upper class and white communities and behaviors shaped by these discourses, i.e., independence, self-making, personal responsibility are too often used as solutions to the problems of poor and working class, African American and white girls. These “solutions” do not consider the values and responsibilities of girls in poor and working class communities. Putting a girl on an athletic team, giving her a mentor, or enrolling her in a summer art class does not necessarily give a poor or working class girl what she needs to overcome all of the constraints she encounters. Girls are constantly negotiating experiences-at home, in schools and communities, with peers, through media- that are sometimes empowering and sometimes disempowering. Moreover, the empowering and debilitating factors that girls encounter are not causes of success and failure. An unexpected

pregnancy does not necessarily mean one's life goals will not be reached, just as a concerned and resourceful teacher cannot make a girl successful. Current youth development policies and programs do not consider the community and cultural support that poor and working class girls need to reach their goals. Instead, they assume that girls will strip themselves of who they are and where they come from in search of the American Dream. Current policies and programs support the myths of American ideals, which poor and working class girls will not and cannot buy into because in reality, their everyday life experiences contradict these ideals.

Many youth workers believe that if we can remove girls from their social situations and influences they will be better equipped to reach their goals. These assertions imply that there is nothing worthy about living in the ghetto or poor and working class communities and that girls will want to leave their homes! In American society where we embrace competition, individualism, and personal responsibility, we can learn from the larger social values prevalent in these girls' communities. Communal living, taking care of others, and family orientedness should be celebrated and rewarded, not barriers to one's success. For poor and working class girls to reach their goals, youth development policies and programs must integrate an understanding of their experiences and values, resources and barriers, that includes caring, family, community, and individualistic ambitions.

6.2.1 Improving Girls' Futures

Numerous people play a role in shaping the lives of girls. In this section, I offer suggestions to policymakers, schools, community programs, parents, and girls for better preparing girls for the future.

6.2.1.1 Policies and Funding For Girls Programs

This study can provide policymakers and youth development professionals with an understanding of how career aspirations are formed which will help them reformulate strategies for supporting young people. A young person's social position yields various connections to people, resources, and experiences which do not only shape their barriers and opportunities but also their aspirations. Policymakers and funders should support programs that raise young people's own understandings of how larger structural contexts influence their life outcomes. As Julie Bettie (2003: 146) suggests, "Even the smallest exposure to knowledge of structural inequality might aid those students who can only see their status as linked to their own and their parents' individual inadequacies." This is especially important given my findings that girls' access support and resources themselves. Because girls create their own capital they need to have an accurate picture of resources and constraints.

More qualitative studies that inquire and explore girls' experiences should be funded so that we can learn about the meanings they attached to their aspirations, choices, and futures. In the Pittsburgh region, we know very little about our girls beyond basic education and health statistics or statistics that deem them "at-risk." Qualitative studies can help us learn how girls in this region are experiencing larger social, economic, and cultural changes that directly impact them. Moreover, several regional quantitative studies have been conducted by the University of Pittsburgh Center for Social and Urban Research that explore the social and economic positions of women and minorities. These studies could incorporate girls in several ways. First, longitudinal studies that examine transitions into adulthood could yield better understandings of the paths girls in the region are taking in terms of education, traditional and nontraditional careers, and full and part-time work. Second, more qualitative work can be done to further

understand the perceptions of girls and why they chose particular career paths. The results of these types of studies can be used to inform funding for girls' development programs.

Policymakers who guide and fund youth development programs must also recognize that career planning information needs to be offered in an accessible manner to students and parents so that they can make informed decisions about their futures. There are many regional efforts to connect young people and parents to labor market information. However, this information is fragmented (specific to certain industries and economic development needs) and difficult for students and parents to interpret. For example, one regional public awareness campaign offers the same presentation of regional labor market information to businesses, students, and PTA's. Not only do each of these groups have different needs, they also understand and use labor market information differently. Moreover, policymakers and funders should make youth development programs accessible by incorporating the values of poor and working class communities and family and by understanding the gender, class, and race-specific needs of them.

6.2.1.2 Schools

School personnel can only teach students about the impact of gender, social class, and race if they are informed about those impacts themselves. Schools must raise awareness among teachers about structural barriers that confront girls. This can be done through the creation of relationships between academic researchers and community activists and schools. For example, I recently reviewed gender-based curriculum developed by the Carnegie Science Center to develop girls' interests in math and science programs. This curriculum will be used by local school districts. In my review, I offered suggestions about ways to confront the class and raced-based barriers girls face when attempting to pursue careers in math and science. Career guidance in schools (or its absence, as reported by students and mothers in this study) is a reflection of

class-based problems that arise in working class schools. Both students and mothers reported little opportunity for career exploration or guidance activities in middle schools. Cuts in public education funding, particularly since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, limits resources for career education. Informal conversations with guidance counselors suggest the role of the guidance counselor in working class schools now is primarily disciplinarian and based on behavior management. As a result, the time counselors spend doing career guidance is compromised. Moreover, the roles guidance counselors want to have are often incongruent with the role the school district expects them to play. Some want to be psychologists, counseling students with home and life issues, while others see their role as service providers. This must be clarified in order for students—particularly in poor and working class districts—to receive adequate career counseling.

6.2.1.3 Community programs

The number of girls' development programs in Southwestern Pennsylvania has dramatically increased over the past five years. Yet these programs often serve the needs of white and middle class girls or serve girls under the assumption of a universal girl experience. Moreover, most of these programs focus on themes of girl empowerment, further emphasizing girls' responsibility in taking their lives into their own hands, reinventing themselves, and individual health and well-being. Local programs for girls need to incorporate structural concerns. They should teach girls to understand sexism, classism, and racism in the education and labor markets and ways to negotiate these systemic barriers.

Programs that not only expose girls to people and opportunities outside of their social networks and experiences but also enable women from similar backgrounds to discuss gender, social class, and racial barriers would not only help girls resist structural inequalities but also

encourage them to participate in activities that change social and economic systems. Poor and working class girls have limited exposure to cultural and career possibilities. Programs that either take girls out of their communities or introduce them to cultural and educational opportunities within their own community expose them to possibilities beyond what their families can provide.

Providing girls with social capital also expands their opportunities. Mentoring programs have large success rates, but mentoring programs that match mentors that have an understanding of the girls' backgrounds could be even more successful. Discussions with girls about positive peer relationships are in place and are useful, but programs that unravel the sexist, classist, and racist nature of these relationships could help them to understand systemic inequalities and violence against women.

Along with A Place for Girls, I am working to develop an equity based career education curriculum that exposes girls to sexism and racism in the national and local labor market so that they can learn to challenge the stereotypes that discourage people from entering and advancing in certain fields. There are three parts to this program. First, it provides general career exploration activities to girls. Second, it incorporates discussions and activities on sexism, classism, and racism in the education and labor market systems. Finally, it exposes and connects girls to people who "have made it" and who also share their upbringing. Ultimately, this program equips girls to recognize and challenge how biases work not only on a societal level but in their individual experiences so that they know that sexism, classism, and racism, are institutionalized in education and labor market systems and not their fault, nor should they be internalized.

6.2.1.4 Mothers

When I discuss this study with people outside of the academy, they often suggest that if a child does not succeed, it's because he/she has immoral, unloving, or unmotivated parents. What is neglected in their seemingly commonsense responses is an understanding of the ways in which various forms of resources (economic, social, cultural capital) as well as mothers' own experiences in the workforce impact how they can help shape their children's futures. Most often, mothers want the best for their children's futures, but because of their own social location, they may be unsure how to shape it themselves.

Studies consistently show that mothers are the primary source of career information. Yet, as I have illustrated, mothers lack the knowledge and resources they need to help their daughters prepare for their futures. Popular responses to mothers' lack of helping their daughters are that they are not good mothers. Ignored in these responses is that mothers lack the money to enroll their daughters in development programs, they lack the ability to find information about opportunities, they are often reluctant to take advantage of opportunities because they do not have time, they are critical of institutions, or they do not understand the benefits such opportunities can yield. Moreover, most mothers report that their information comes from their immediate social circles of friends and family members. These resources are often inadequate because these people often lack the types of information girls need. Programs that provide career exploration, education, and resources to mothers could not only help inform mothers about career possibilities, but also connect them to people and resources they need to help their daughters plan.

Not surprisingly, mothers in this study had a strong belief that the school would shape their children's educational experiences and decision-making for their future careers. Many said

they “would not know where to begin” if their children had questions about careers with which they were unfamiliar and often sent their daughters directly to school personnel to have their questions answered. Yet at the same time, many mothers mistrusted teachers and school curriculum. This suggests that improving communication and relationships between mothers and schools would be one way to help mothers better help their daughters. Schools can foster better relationships with parents by offering programs that provide parents with practical resources, e.g., how to help your daughter with algebra homework, how to fill out financial aid forms. Many of these programs are provided in middle class but not poor and working class districts. Schools should act as community resources that serve not just the students who attend them, but family systems as well.

Poor and working class mothers are also often torn between their unresolved dreams and current lives. Mothers who are doing something to advance their own aspirations are better at helping their daughters find resources than mothers who have regrets about their own career paths. Many of the mothers in this study talked about wanting to change careers or go back to school. Programs that help recognize and pursue their own interests can introduce mothers to new people, opportunities, interests, and resources that they can share with their daughters.

Working class children who grow up with limited exposure to educational and occupational “success” are less likely than middle class children to be surrounded by people who have “made it”. All of the girls I interviewed had parents with limited educational achievement and occupational status. These parents cannot draw from their own education and work experiences to give their daughters the tools they need to reach their goals. If mothers are the primary source of information, they must be assisted in helping their daughters’ prepare for the future.

6.3 CONCLUSION

More opportunities are available to girls of all backgrounds today than ever before. However, in a global capitalist society, one's life chances are increasingly becoming one's personal responsibility. To help a poor and working class, African American and white girls achieve "Whatever Her Little Heart Desires," we can start by shaping girls' critical consciousness. This means acknowledging and confronting the unique gender barriers these girls face, creating a language for social class that helps girls see the impact of the larger social structure on their individual lives, and teaching girls to recognize and resist how racism operates in our society. Institutions such as schools and community-based programs can also begin to understand and adopt poor and working class community values to attract girls and to structurally make programs work for them.

**APPENDIX A-NO KIDS ALLOWED!!! HOW IRB ETHICS UNDERMINE
QUALITATIVE RESEARCHERS FROM ACHIEVING SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE
ETHICAL STANDARDS**

Introduction

This paper explores how Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) undermine qualitative researchers from achieving socially informed ethical standards that are promoted by youth, feminist, critical race, queer, and cultural studies. While designing and carrying out my dissertation (a feminist research project), I learned that although IRBs seek ethical research approaches, their overly restrictive requirements limit research on children in ways that exclude or silence some children's voices. IRB policies and procedures, ironically, further marginalize disadvantaged people whom youth, feminist, critical race, queer, and cultural studies researchers want to make visible. What follows is my story of the numerous contentions I discovered carrying out a feminist qualitative research project and how in each stage of the research process I encountered incongruities between ethical research practices and what the IRB policies permitted me to do. I learned that IRB policies and procedures inadvertently block the voices of youth, homogenize youth subjects, result in researchers being imposed upon youth subjects, and limit the dissemination of research, all in the name of protection of vulnerable subjects.

My dissertation explores the ways class and race influence how working class and poor adolescent girls perceive their futures. I am interested in the types of futures girls want to

pursue, what careers they want, the social and cultural resources they use to plan their futures, their perceptions of the characteristics they have (or will need) to pursue their goals, and the barriers they may encounter as they progress through their education. I am also interested in how mothers perceive their daughters' futures, including the careers they desire for their daughters, the social and cultural resources they have and use to help their daughters plan, the characteristics they see in their daughters that will help them reach their goals, the messages and modeling mothers provide to help shape their daughters' ideas, and the barriers they perceive their children may face.

In conceptualizing this project, I wanted to gain insight into the girls' individual and everyday experiences so that I could gauge the way gender, race, and social class influence their perceptions of the future. To capture the experiences and voices of girls and mothers, I wanted to employ qualitative methods of data gathering, including observations, focus group interviews and individual interviews. When I approached peers and mentors with these ideas they warned, "Stay Away from Kids!" because IRB policies and processes make it difficult to pursue research with children. I wondered why fellow *feminist* scholars would suggest I shy away from a project that gives voice to girls. I ignored their advice and moved forward with the project, but soon realized what they meant.

Underlying Principles of IRBs

The United States Department of Health and Human Services codified regulations protecting human subjects in 1983. Known as the "Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects" or the "Common Rule," these regulations were adopted by federal agencies that conduct, support, or regulate human subjects research and required any institution engaged in research involving

human subjects and supported by a federal agency to establish an IRB (US Department of Health and Human Services, 1993). Thus, IRBs were established in local universities as a result of social anxieties about the (un)intended consequences of scientific research, several highly controversial social research studies, and the onset of what Andrew Cooper (2001) calls an “audit society” including the implementation of accountability measures in public institutions.

The Federal Policy, as well as local institutional policy, gave IRBs the jurisdiction to approve, require modifications, or disapprove of human subjects’ research. Moreover, the Federal Policy provides ethical guidelines to local institutions from which to draw their approval processes. While the initial intention of the Federal Policy was (and perhaps continues to be) protecting human subjects, universities often conceptualize IRBs as legal entities, set up to protect the university from legal repercussions in the event that a researcher violates research participants.

IRBs are required by the Federal Policy to follow a set of generalized ethical principles, including the assurance of minimal risk of harm to participants, protection of exposing subjects to unnecessary risks, monitoring the equitable selection of subjects, and ensuring that researchers have measures in place to gain informed consent. However, ways of implementing these ethical measures are left up to local IRBs. For example, the University of Pittsburgh IRB requires that researchers outline a data monitoring plan and describe methods to ensure the maintenance of privacy and confidentiality and requires researchers to implement appropriate additional safeguards to protect the rights of those populations who are likely to be vulnerable to coercion or influence, e.g., children, prisoners, pregnant women, decisionally impaired persons, economically or educationally disadvantaged (University of Pittsburgh, Institutional Review Board, 2006). Leaving the implementation of Federal Policy regulations up to local IRBs can be

problematic because local IRB members, usually from medical and hard science fields and concerned with legal implications of human subject protection, often approach research from positivistic and quantitative stances. As a result, most current IRB procedures and the traditional positivistic assumptions on which they rest, assume unbiased research methods and/or an objective perspective. As Clifford Christians (2003: 223) suggests, IRB protocols rest on positivist values that assume value-free or value-neutral methods of studying humans and uncovering one real “truth”. Generally, IRBs also assume that a hierarchical power structure exists between researchers and the researched, or that researchers dominate the interaction but gather information in an unbiased manner (Boser, 2006). We are left with what Christine Halse and Anne Honey (2005: 2162) call a “decontextualized set of principles and procedures” assuming detached, unemotional, disengaged and unconcerned researchers.

The current IRB model does not account for any distinctions in the type of methodologies researchers use, but does prioritize protections that focus on the physical well-being of participants because the ethics are based on historically used medical research models that legally protect the university. Underlying the policies and procedures of IRBs are ethics that assume the highest level of protection is needed, especially when working with special populations like children. Moreover, current IRB models rest on the assumption that their policies and procedures serve as an ethics clearinghouse, or that the individual ethics of researchers, their committee members, and their disciplines are not built into research projects, or if they are, carry little or no weight in the research process.

Because IRBs try to be legal and ethical, they create contradictions for qualitative researchers who seek to carry out complex and socially informed ethical standards within their projects. IRB ethics are fixed at submission, and once a researcher passes through the IRB, it is assumed they

are carrying out an ethical project. But feminist qualitative researchers are concerned with deeper ethical standards throughout all stages of the research process. For feminist qualitative researchers, ethics are never fixed but are reflected upon continuously.

The Ethical Concerns of a Feminist Qualitative Researcher

Like IRBs, feminist qualitative researchers seek to protect research participants. However, they also seek to empower them and do so by critiquing research processes that have historically silenced research subjects. From the initial stages of research, feminists qualitative researchers make visible an empathetic concern for participants and argue that objective, bias free research cannot be achieved (Haraway, 1988). Feminist ethical researchers implement issues of privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent to create honest and egalitarian relationships with research participants. In doing so, they complicate these seemingly ethical strategies and illuminate the limitations of assuming them as protective measures. For example, Madeline Leonard (2007) asks of privacy, What if participants want to be named and heard?; informed consent, Can we ever truly inform participants of what is going to happen when we cannot predict it ourselves?; and confidentiality, How can confidentiality be achieved in group interviews when other participants are not sworn to secrecy?

Feminist qualitative researchers also reflect on the relationship between themselves and the research participants as well as the factors that shape the research interaction. They remain conscious of their biographies and identities and scrutinize how their political agendas impact data collection, interpretation, and the representation of research participants (Best, 2007; Fine, et. al., 1996; Frankenberg, 1993; Taft, 2007;). They reflect on power dynamics in research interactions and processes of establishing rapport and trust (Thorne, 1993). While this certainly

does not mean equal power is achieved, a reflection on power dynamics, rapport, and trust helps the researcher examine ways to reduce her own power and the possibility of exploiting participants (Best, 2007). Researchers also grapple with their “insider” statuses, or how a shared background can either facilitate access to and understanding of research participants’ perspectives, or limit their ability to remain unbiased. Conversely, they struggle with their “outsider” statuses, or how coming from a different background than participants can prevent them from forming relationships with participants or establish trust (Blee, 2003; Olesen, 2003).

Feminist qualitative researchers are also careful in how they represent the experiences, feelings and perceptions, and behaviors of research participants. In doing so, they accept that knowledge claims from disadvantaged groups have been ignored and multiple subjectivities inform experiences. In representing participants, feminist qualitative researchers seek to illuminate their stories and voices, speaking for and with them, rather than about them (Collins, 1990; Smith, 1987).

Feminist qualitative research is not without fault and offers no full-proof guarantee in protecting research participants, nor do all people who call themselves feminist qualitative researchers always follow all of the ethical principles outlined above. But the willingness of researchers to subject themselves and their projects to ongoing critical questioning and reflection differs from IRB processes that emphasize positivism and objectivity at the onset of the project. In my project, I was most concerned with giving voice to girls, reaching out to girls from diverse backgrounds, creating a relationship with girls, and sharing my findings with organizations. But the IRB’s legally based ethical standards created difficulties in reaching these ethical goals.

Giving Voice to Girls

One of the reasons that colleagues warned me not to study children is because the IRB deems them a “special population” and requires researchers to institute additional and somewhat onerous ethical safeguards. If researchers implement additional safeguards, the IRB permits research with children as long as it poses no more than a minimal risk to their health and welfare and presents a “reasonable opportunity to further the understanding, prevention, or alleviation of a serious problem affecting the health or welfare of children” (University of Pittsburgh, Institutional Review Board, Sec. 6.1.3, 2007).

From the beginning of my project, I found the IRB’s framing of children as a Special Subject Population problematic due to its epistemological construction of child research subjects as vulnerable and in need of protection. By framing children as vulnerable, IRBs assume a dominating adult-child relationship where children are unable to make decisions for themselves. Researchers who want work with children must write long and tedious proposals about how they will “protect” children.

As a feminist qualitative researcher, I recognized that age differences between participants and me necessitated a critical analysis of power dynamics. For example, working with poor and working-class girls meant that I shared an economic background with the white girls, many of whom are growing up in the same neighborhood where I lived. However, I realized that the girls were also living and growing up in a distinct social, economic, and cultural time. I evaluated age as a factor that intersects with gender, race, social class and other identities so that I could explore the dynamics of the research process. Jessica Taft (2007: 223) argues that youth researchers have an ethical responsibility to reflect upon age dynamics:

The danger of the portrayal of research as objective and without the influence of the researcher, is of course present in research with youth. Unfortunately some still assume their ability to portray the complete truth of ‘what it means to be a teenager today.’ In research on youth, these claims reinscribe the power of adults to define

what youth are like and what they should be like. Thus, by enacting the authority of the scientist, these researchers also enact and reproduce the authority of the adult. The epistemological claims are, in this way, translated into a political stance of ageism and adult power. Exploring and writing about the issues of similarity, difference, and power—in short, being reflexive—is not simply a theoretical concern but a political one.

In the last twenty years, a framework for studying children has emerged called “New Childhood Studies” which utilizes methods and perspectives from feminist, critical race, queer and cultural studies to analyze how to recruit, work with, and represent young people in research projects (Best, 2006). New Childhood Studies seeks to understand childhood as both a social construction and a structural form (Corsaro, 1997). Acknowledging childhood as a social construction means reconceptualizing the category of childhood differently than the traditional adult-centered models developmental psychologists created. Adult-centered models of childhood have historically viewed childhood a distinct period of time where the child is “incomplete” until reaching adulthood, homogenized children across gender, racial, and economic locations, and distanced adults and children where “that distance is negotiable through the position of the knowing adult” (Raby, 2007: 39). Reconceptualizing childhood as a “structural form” means that researchers who work with children interrogate age, alongside gender, race, social class and other identities as a factor influencing the research process (Corsaro, 1997). This includes analyses of how researchers can be both “insiders” and “outsiders” at the same time (Blee, 2003).

New Childhood Studies have challenged the passivity and protective needs of children arguing that we need to see children as active, creative social agents (Corsaro, 1997). Youth studies scholars treat children and youth as capable of negotiating their own lives, making decisions for themselves, and as “reflexive social agents and producers of culture” (Best, 2007:

11). They encourage researchers not only to interrogate their own power in research relationships but also to recognize the power held by young people as research subjects.

Empowering children is an ethical goal of feminist qualitative research but IRBs cannot acknowledge children as actors because they are limited by their own legal frameworks, set up to protect universities from legal liability, which prohibit minors from giving legal consent. As a result, IRBs lose sight of what feminist qualitative researchers would see as a higher ethical principle—understanding children on their own terms—and implement protective measures that apply to all child participants. Moreover, IRBs’ homogenization of children precludes researchers from capturing diverse experiences of girls.

Capturing Diverse Experiences of Girls

Informed consent is a primary ethical concern for IRBs, especially if children are the participants. The University of Pittsburgh’s IRB (Sec. 8.1, 2006) suggests that consent is an “ongoing process, not a single event,” yet the IRB requires researchers to submit a modification to their protocol if they change any of the recruitment strategies throughout the process. After complying with the consent policies of the University of Pittsburgh IRB, I was left with a four-page consent form plus a cover letter to send home with children. I was disheartened by the length of the form, knowing that if I were a parent and received a five-page letter from my daughter’s organization in addition to her school work and documents, and if that letter were marked VOLUNTARY on the front, I would probably throw it in the trash. I assume this happened in my own study. I sent home approximately 20 consent packets with the girls in one after-school program and 40 with the girls in another program. I waited several weeks, but no

forms were returned. I repeated this process with both organizations twice, and waited. Ultimately, no forms were returned.

There are additional barriers to gaining parental consent of disadvantaged children. When I recruited girls for my study, the IRB suggested that even after I obtained consent on paper, I should also call parents and confirm their consent. In several cases, parents who signed the consent forms neglected to include a phone number, included disconnected numbers, or did not answer their phone. Several parents also put the correct phone number on the consent form, agreed to do the interview, dodged me when I tried to schedule a meeting, or scheduled a meeting and didn't answer their door when I arrived. It is not that these parents were necessarily ill-intentioned; they may have had concerns about my project's purpose. Even the most well intentioned parents have difficulties adding one more thing to their daily lives.

How these procedures construct children as vulnerable was also evident in my experience recruiting from a local organization that served girls, some of whom were in foster care. The University of Pittsburgh, Institutional Review Board, Section 6.1.9 (2006) states that "Under PA law, neither foster parents nor CYS (Children and Youth Services) can provide consent for the child, only a birth parent, or person adjudicated as an adoptive parent can provide consent." In other words, I had to exclude any girl currently in foster care or go through the girls' caseworker to track down a biological parent to gain consent which further complicated an already difficult parental consent procedure, making consent from those girls even less likely.

A disturbing incident that captures the harm of constraining access to and excluding these girls occurred at an organizational gathering where I was recruiting mothers and girls. During this event, a girl came up to me and asked why I did not ask her to participate in my study. I responded by asking her if she was in foster care, and she replied, "Yes." I responded, quite

embarrassingly, that I wasn't allowed to study girls "in transition." After reflecting on this incident, I still do not know how else I could have expressed the limits the IRB imposed on my research to have made this girl understand that she had done nothing to warrant the exclusion; the decision to exclude her from the study was forced on me.

The IRB inadvertently silenced the voices of and potential advocacy for girls in foster care by assuming the accessibility of biological parents and reinforcing the stigmatization of these girls. But it was clear that if I homogenized the girls with whom I worked, I would miss out on understanding their special and unique differences and experiences, a primary objective of my project. If I were working in a school or another organization that might serve foster children, would I be required to determine the foster care status of all children prior to recruiting them? What should researchers do when they don't know who is in foster care and who is not? Must we first ask about all children's foster care status or do we proceed unethically in the eyes of the IRB? What is the harm of not including foster children? Moreover, being unable to change recruitment procedures in the middle of my data collection (unless I went through and onerous modification) left me feeling frustrated at the amount of additional work, not to mention the potential of being "unethical" in the eyes of the IRB if I changed my recruitment strategies without informing them.

Imposing the Researcher

My recruitment frustrations were exacerbated when I considered how often I also had to navigate other levels of authority to gain consent, an issue that IRBs neglect. Madeline Leonard (2007: 133) suggests that when working with youth, "consent is commonly sought from adults in the first instance, and only after this has been secured are children given the opportunity to agree

to be researched.” Researchers have to gain entry first through the organizations with which they work. In my experiences working in a school in a previous project, I had to go through several levels of protection set up by the district, including gaining permission from the superintendent and school board, having the school psychologist approve my interview questions, and agreeing let the middle school guidance counselor be present during my focus groups. For my dissertation project, I first had to approach the executive director of an organization to gain permission. In this conversation, I had to show the organization the benefits for participating in my study and agree not only to share my findings, but also help them find ways to use the findings in their programs. This did not mean I had access to the girls. I then had to meet and explain my study to the organization’s staff and get them to agree that my project was worth the girls’ participation. Once I had staff buy-in (or teacher buy-in in the case of the school) I had to approach the girls to recruit. As I proceeded with recruiting, I negotiated with the staff who wanted to help me, but according to IRB policies were not permitted to encourage the girls in any way.

It is unsettling to go through layers of adult “gatekeepers” before approaching girls to participate in a study, even before they are told about the project (Leonard, 2007: 133). As Leonard argues “the first stages of research with children is characterized by their invisibility and passivity irrespective of the subsequent approaches the researcher later intends to adopt to render the child an active subject of the research process” (134). Instead of pitching my study to the girls, I had to first gain the permission of the executive director and was then imposed on staff. After gaining staff buy-in, I was then imposed on the girls.

Similarly, when I used a snowball sample, I recruited participants by asking adult women whom I knew to ask their family members and friends with adolescent daughters to participate.

When potential participants agreed, I made a phone call to the mother to ask if she and her daughter would participate and then set up a meeting. Only one out of approximately twenty mothers requested that I ask her daughter first before agreeing to participate. Most often after talking with me, mothers agreed to participate without discussing the project with their daughters, and I was then imposed on their girls.

The IRB's protective nature enacts a consent process that assumes adults can and must speak for children. Initially, when I proposed to observe girls in their after-school setting prior to conducting interviews in attempt to get to know them, the IRB refused this request and told me I needed to gain parental consent first, before interacting in any way with the girls. This prevented the girls from getting to know me, and me getting to know them, before agreeing to participate in the project. If the girls had become familiar with me first, they may have come to trust me, and perhaps more would have been willing to participate and more likely to persuade their parents to sign the consent forms. Instead, IRB required consent from adults first, including the organizational gatekeepers and mothers prior to girls' participation. The IRB seeks to protect girls but ignores other hierarchies of power through which researchers must navigate to access child participants. This is evidence that the IRB sees itself as *the* ethics clearinghouse and illustrates that IRBs do not construct access to participants as an ongoing reality of research (Best, 2007).

Feminist qualitative researchers seek to work with participants on their own terms, such as being flexible about where, when, and how research will take place. People from disadvantaged backgrounds may be skeptical of academic researchers because they may fear researchers will misrepresent them and because past academic research has supported negative public stereotypes about them, i.e., *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (Herrnstein

and Murray, 1994) and *The Moynihan Report* (Moynihan, 1965). They also may mistrust academic researchers if they have had negative encounters with institutions and may have experienced signing documents and forms in social services agencies that are often dehumanizing and punitive. The IRB's rigid rules disallow the flexibility necessary to recruit and access participants. Instead, IRBs force researchers to stick to their initially proposed methods of recruitment or fill out a rigorous modification form. This contradicts feminist qualitative work which understands the need to be flexible and work with participants on their terms, which is especially important when working with families from disadvantaged backgrounds.

IRBs legal and ethical expectations complicate research with disadvantaged populations. IRBs assume a middle-class experience—that people are accessible, that onerous consent forms are easily read and understood, that adults speak for children, and poor and working-class people are willing potential research participants. My experiences showed that potential participants placed value on personal contact and trust-building, as well as a face-to-face explanation of the research study and process. My participants never wanted to read the forms after they were explained or “keep a copy for their records” as the IRB assumed they would. The IRB also poses both class-based and racialized assumptions of the family in its processes. For example, the issue of gaining consent of a biological parent illustrates what Pat Hill Collins (1990) refers to as reproductive heteronormativity or the assumption that only biological parents, especially mothers, can parent children. IRBs take away the voices of young people who are not living with or may not have contact with their biological parents.

Disseminating information

One way I gained access to girls in the after school program was by illustrating to the organization ways it could benefit by allowing girls to participate in my study, which meant at the least, sharing my findings. Additionally, a local foundation offered funding for the project on the condition that I work with the organization to use my findings to change its programs to better serve the girls. When I submitted a draft of my protocol to the IRB I received advice from a staff member that I should not share information with the staff because the confidentiality of girls could be revealed. However, this staff member suggested, I was still obligated to report any incidences of child abuse or dangerous behavior among the girls.

The IRB was essentially telling me that I cannot share my findings with the organization because the sample size was too small and information might be able to be traced back to one particular girl. I also understood that while I couldn't give voice to the girls regarding the resources they needed to better plan their futures, I was required by law to implicate them if they were participating in any illegal, harmful, or immoral behavior. This is extremely troubling given that the organization let me conduct research in exchange for a report and help strategizing ways to work with girls. Ethically, I knew I couldn't do the research without giving back to the organization and the girls with whom I worked. In my final proposal I did not discuss my intentions of sharing the findings with the organization.

The IRB's concern with my sharing findings with the organization illustrates its' insistence on protecting children when it comes to issues of confidentiality and anonymity. But these protective measures are complicated and difficult to negotiate and maintain. For example, feminist qualitative researchers such as Madeline Leonard (2007) recognize that participants in focus groups have the potential to obstruct confidentiality. That is, as a researcher, I am obligated to inform participants how the information they provide will be protected from release

but I cannot control what information is released by other participants in a focus group. How does one really ensure confidentiality in a focus group?

In addition, feminist qualitative researchers who interrogate power dynamics within the research relationship also recognize that “anonymity” is tricky to negotiate in the research process (Best, 2007). IRBs, organizations with whom we work, and often participants will agree to take part in research under the condition of anonymity because each of these parties is at ease that the participant will not be able to be identified. On the other hand, as Leonard (2007: 133) states, “children may have a different conception of anonymity.” That is, in her research, she found that some of the children wanted their voices to be heard and that the process of anonymity or providing pseudonyms for kids was actually a way of silencing them. I found the issue of anonymity hard to negotiate in my own research project, but for a different reason. In my first recruitment session I told the girls I was required to change their names in any reporting of the information, i.e., they would be anonymous, and at the end of my script I asked if anyone had questions. One of the girls raised her hand and said, “Are you sure you aren’t going to be puttin’ our business out on the street?” In this case, I had to reassure the girls of anonymity. This reassurance probably motivated some of the girls to participate and reiterating anonymity in the group interview may have encouraged them to open up more. However, during the focus groups and interviews I constantly felt the need to apologize when we had discussions of anonymity because I was required to tell them I would change their names and keep everything confidential, *unless* they told me they were hurting themselves or others, or participating in illegal behavior. While I reassured them I wouldn’t ask any private questions and often made light of this point, I think this discussion of confidentiality and anonymity that highlighted their

potential harmful behavior might have made them more suspicious of the kinds of questions I was going to ask and what I was going to do with their information.

Feminist qualitative researchers recognize that confidentiality and anonymity are aspects of the research process that must continuously be negotiated between the researcher and the individual participant but IRBs require researchers to establish them at the onset of the project. It is possible, especially in focus groups, that participants will share information presented by someone in their cohort and a careful researcher would discuss these possibilities with the participants. Moreover, anonymity is not necessarily an assurance of comfort for participants. Some participants may want their voices to be heard, others may only want something of their information disclosed, and some may never trust a researcher enough to share. When researching children, who are too often made to feel voiceless, passive, and unable to speak for themselves, we need to treat confidentiality and anonymity as ongoing. Instead, the IRB's construction of childhood again becomes an impediment to research. In this case, the IRB tries to protect children, but its implementation of protection creates suspicion among children as agents of their own intent.

Implications

Feminist qualitative research trains us to be curious about and critique the systems in which we work. In my dissertation project, I was ethically concerned with giving voice to girls, representing girls from diverse backgrounds, establishing a relationship with girls, and giving back to the organizations with whom I worked. These concerns represent a deeper, more complex sociological understanding of the research process than do the legal ethical principles

grounding IRB policies and procedures. IRBs seek to protect research participants, but in doing so, create a potentially unjust situation for already marginalized groups.

What do the contradictions I faced mean for qualitative researchers who seek to understand participants on their own terms, study the issues they face, and ultimately give them a voice? I worry that potential IRB barriers will steer qualitative researchers away from their interests toward more positivistic, objective forms of research. I wonder if PhD programs will be reluctant to accept students with qualitative interests because their projects have the potential to take longer than quantitative work. My biggest fear is that researchers will heed the advice of their mentors and colleagues that NO KIDS ARE ALLOWED! and that we will miss opportunities to see children as creative, active social agents who want their voices to be heard.

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APPENDIX B-RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

B. 1 RECRUITMENT LETTER FOR “A GIRLS’ PLACE” PARTICIPANTS

TO: The parents of 13-14 year old girls at (name of organization)
FROM: Melissa Swauger, MA, University of Pittsburgh
DATE: April 24, 2006

My name is Melissa Swauger. I am currently a doctoral student studying sociology at the University of Pittsburgh. I am interested in the influence of gender, class, and race on adolescent career development. I care very deeply about the futures of girls and I would like to recruit mothers and daughters to participate in my research.

I have been given permission by (name of organization) to conduct this research. Included in this packet is a summary of what this research project will entail. Please review the attached documents entitled “**CONSENT TO ACT AS A SUBJECT IN A RESEARCH STUDY**” to find out more about you and your daughter’s participation in this study. Please be advised that this study is completely voluntary. You or your child is not required to participate and your standing with (name of organization) will not be affected. Before you sign the attached forms, or at any time during the study, if you have questions please contact me at 412) 271-4310. If you and your child are interested please follow these directions in completing the form:

- There are two consent forms attached. Carefully read them both and discuss the opportunity to participate with your daughter.
- If you are interested in participating, complete the parent consent form, sign and date all areas that say “Participant’s Signature” and initial all of the pages that say “Participant’s Initials” and include your telephone number on the form
- If your daughter is interested in participating, complete the child consent form, sign and date all areas that say “Parent’s Signature” and “Child’s Signature,” initial all of the pages that say “Parent’s Initials” and include your telephone number on the form
- Keep one copy of each consent form for your records
- Give the other copies of the consent forms to your daughter’s case manager
- Please return the consent forms no later than _____ (2 weeks after dissemination)

I sincerely appreciate you taking the time to read over these materials. I hope that you will join me in uncovering the needs of adolescent girls in preparing for their futures.

Sincerely,
Melissa Swauger, MA
Sociology Department
University of Pittsburgh

B. 2 CONSENT FORM FOR “A GIRLS’ PLACE” PARTICIPANTS

Approval Date: May 22, 2006
Renewal Date: May 21, 2007
University of Pittsburgh
Institutional Review Board
IRB Number: 0604123

CONSENT TO ACT AS A SUBJECT IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: Whatever Her Little Heart Desires-Phase One

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Melissa Swauger, MA, Sociology
2400 Posvar Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15213;
Phone: 412.648-7580
e-mail: mls30@pitt.edu

CO-INVESTIGATORS: Kathleen Blee, PhD, Sociology
2400 Posvar Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15213;
Phone: 412.648-7580

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: The Women and Girls Foundation of Southwestern Pennsylvania
Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to examine how adolescent girls perceive their futures and the resources they use to plan their futures.

Who is being asked to take part in this study?

Girls ages 13-14 receiving services from (name of organization) are being asked to participate.

What procedures will be performed for research purposes?

If you decide to complete, sign, and return this consent form, you are allowing your child to participate in this study. Once I receive your consent, I will contact you to confirm your consent and answer any additional questions you might have. Focus groups and individual interviews are being conducted at (name of organization) between May and August, 2006. During the focus groups and interviews students will be asked about how they think about careers, what they know about educational and career paths, what resources they use to shape their ideas about careers, and how they perceive the futures of girls. Each focus group will take approximately 45 minutes of your child’s time and each interview will take about 60 minutes of your child’s time.

Focus groups will be conducted during a regularly scheduled activity at Gwen's Girls. Interviews will also be conducted during a regularly scheduled activity or during another convenient time for your child. All focus groups and interviews will be tape-recorded.

How will my eligibility for the study be determined?

Girls ages 13-14 receiving services from Gwen's Girls will be eligible to participate.

What are the possible risks and discomforts of this study?

There is little risk involved in this study. Girls will only be asked questions about how they perceive their futures. No questions are intended to expose the children to legal or emotional harm. The major potential risk is a breach of confidentiality, but the researcher will do everything possible to protect your child's privacy. To reduce the likelihood of that happening, the researcher has been thoroughly trained to maintain your child's privacy. This study is completely voluntary. Your child may choose not to participate or not to answer any questions during the study. You or your child's decision to participate will not affect her standing with (name of organization).

Will my child benefit from taking part in this study?

Your child may not receive any direct benefits from participating but possible benefits are that she may learn more about her own future goals a result of participating in this study. In addition, policymakers, guidance counselors, and organizations that work with girls may learn more about addressing the career development needs of the girls they serve.

Are there any costs to me or my child if she participates in this study?

There are no costs to you or your child for participating in this study.

How much will my child be paid if she completes this study?

If your child completes in the focus group, she will receive a \$5 gift card. If she completes the interview she will receive a second \$5 gift card.

Will anyone know that my child is taking part in this study?

All records pertaining to your child's involvement in this study are kept strictly confidential (private) and any data that includes your child's identity will be stored in locked files at all times. The focus groups and interviews will be tape-recorded and the tapes will also be stored in a locked file cabinet. At the end of this study, any records that personally identify your child will remain stored in locked files and will be kept for a minimum of five years. Your child's name will be replaced with a fictitious name in any description or publications of this research. In addition, (name of organization) name will not be identified in description or publication of this research. In unusual cases, your research records may be released in response to an order from a court of law. It is also possible that authorized representatives from the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office, the University of Pittsburgh IRB, or the sponsors of this research study (National Institutes of Mental Health) may review the data for the purpose of monitoring the conduct of this study. Also, if I learn that your child or someone with whom your child is involved is in serious danger of potential harm, I will need to inform the appropriate agencies, as required by Pennsylvania law.

Is my child's participation in this study voluntary?

Yes! Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to allow your child to take part in it, or your child may stop participating at any time, even after signing this form. Your child's participation in this study will not affect her/his standing with Gwen's Girls. Your child may be withdrawn from the study at any time by myself or (name of organization) staff: for example, if your child refuses tape-recording or is disruptive during the focus groups.

How can I get more information about this study?

If you have any further questions about this research study, you may contact the investigators listed at the beginning of this consent form. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate at the University of Pittsburgh IRB Office, 1.866.212.2668.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

All of the above has been explained to me and my child and all of my current questions have been answered. I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that such future questions will be answered by the researchers listed on the first page of this form. Any questions I have about my child's rights as a research participant will be answered by the Human Subject Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh (1-866-212-2668).

I understand that, as a minor (age less than 18 years), the above-named child is not permitted to participate in this research study without my consent. Therefore, by signing this form, I give my consent for his/her participation in this research study.

Parent's Signature

Date

Telephone number

BOTH CHILD AND PARENT COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SECTION:

The research has been explained to me, and I agree to participate.

Child Participant

Child Participant's Signature

Date

Parent's Name (Print)

Relationship to Participant (Child)

Parent's Signature

Date

CERTIFICATION OF INFORMED CONSENT COMPLETED BY RESEARCHER

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the above-named individual(s), and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individual(s) have about this study have been answered, and I will always be available to address future questions as they arise.

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Role in Research Study

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

B. 3 CONSENT FORM FOR “A GIRLS’ PLACE” MOTHER PARTICIPANTS

Approval Date: May 22, 2006
Renewal Date: May 21, 2007
University of Pittsburgh
Institutional Review Board
IRB Number: 0604123

CONSENT TO ACT AS A SUBJECT IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: **Whatever Her Little Heart Desires-Phase One**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Melissa Swauger, MA, Sociology
2400 Posvar Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15213;
Phone: 412.648-7580
e-mail: mls30@pitt.edu

CO-INVESTIGATORS: Kathleen Blee, PhD, Sociology
2400 Posvar Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15213;
Phone: 412.648-7580

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: The Women and Girls Foundation of Southwestern Pennsylvania

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to examine how adolescent girls perceive their futures and the resources they use to plan their futures.

Who is being asked to take part in this study?

Mothers of girls ages 13-14 receiving services from (name of organization) are being asked to participate.

What procedures will be performed for research purposes?

If you decide to complete, sign, and return this consent form, you are agreeing to participate in an interview to discuss your daughter’s perceptions about the future. Interviews are being conducted at (name of organization) between May and August, 2006. During the interviews you will be asked about your involvement in your child’s education and decision-making, your knowledge of your child’s future aspirations and the resources you use to gain information about

careers to relay to your child. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes of your time. Interviews will be conducted at your convenience. All interviews will be tape-recorded.

How will my eligibility for the study be determined?

Mothers of girls ages 13-14 receiving services from (name of organization) will be eligible to participate.

What are the possible risks and discomforts of this study?

There is little risk involved in this study. You will only be asked questions about your daughter's future and how you help your daughter make decisions about the future. No questions are intended to expose you to legal or emotional harm. The major potential risk is a breach of confidentiality, but the researcher will do everything possible to protect your child's privacy. To reduce the likelihood of that happening, the researcher has been thoroughly trained to maintain your privacy. This study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or not to answer any questions during the study. Your decision to participate will not affect your child's standing with (name of organization).

Will I benefit from taking part in this study?

You may not receive any direct benefits from participating but possible benefits are that you may learn more about planning for your child's future by participating in this study. In addition, policymakers, guidance counselors, and organizations that work with girls may learn more about addressing the career development needs of the girls and mothers they serve.

Are there any costs to me for participating in this study?

There are no costs to you for participating in this study.

How much will I be paid if I complete this study?

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Will anyone know that I am taking part in this study?

All records pertaining to your involvement in this study are kept strictly confidential (private) and any data that includes your identity will be stored in locked files at all times. The interviews will be tape-recorded and the tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet. At the end of this study, any records that personally identify you will remain stored in locked files and will be kept for a minimum of five years. Your name will be replaced with a fictitious name in any description or publications of this research. In addition, Gwen's Girls' name will not be identified in description or publication of this research. In unusual cases, your research records may be released in response to an order from a court of law. It is also possible that authorized representatives from the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office, the University of Pittsburgh IRB, or the sponsors of this research study (National Institutes of Mental Health) may review the data for the purpose of monitoring the conduct of this study. Also, if I learn that you or someone with whom you are involved is in serious danger of potential harm, I will need to inform the appropriate agencies, as required by Pennsylvania law.

Is my participation in this study voluntary?

Yes! Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to take part, or you may stop participating at any time, even after signing this form. Your participation in this study will not affect your child's standing with Gwen's Girls.

How can I get more information about this study?

If you have any further questions about this research study, you may contact the investigators listed at the beginning of this consent form. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate at the University of Pittsburgh IRB Office, 1.866.212.2668.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

All of the above has been explained to me and all of my current questions have been answered. I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that such future questions will be answered by the researchers listed on the first page of this form. Any questions I have about my rights as a research participant will be answered by the Human Subject Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh (412-648-7580).

By signing this form, I give my consent to participate in this research study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Telephone number

RESEARCHER COMPLETES THE FOLLOWING SECTION: CERTIFICATION of INFORMED CONSENT

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the above-named individual(s), and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individual(s) have about this study have been answered, and we will always be available to address future questions as they arise.

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Role in Research Study

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

B. 4 CONSENT FORM FOR GIRLS IN SNOWBALL SAMPLE

Approval Date: October 20, 2006
Renewal Date: October 19, 2007
University of Pittsburgh
Institutional Review Board
IRB Number: #0609113

CONSENT TO ACT AS A SUBJECT IN A RESEARCH STUDY-Girls

TITLE: **Whatever Her Little Heart Desires-Phase Two**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Melissa Swauger, MA, Sociology
2400 Posvar Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15213;
Phone: 412) 648-7580
e-mail: mls30@pitt.edu

CO-INVESTIGATORS: Kathleen Blee, PhD, Sociology
2400 Posvar Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15213;
Phone: 412) 648-7580

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: None

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to examine how adolescent girls perceive their futures and the resources they use to plan their futures.

Who is being asked to take part in this study?

Girls ages 13-14 are being asked to participate.

What procedures will be performed for research purposes?

If you decide to complete, sign, and return this consent form, you are allowing your adolescent to participate in an individual interview. During the interview, adolescents will be asked about how they think about careers, what they know about educational and career paths, what resources they use to shape their ideas about careers, and how they perceive the futures of girls. Each interview will take about 60 minutes of your adolescent's time. Interviews will be conducted during a convenient time for your adolescent. All interviews will be tape-recorded.

How will my eligibility for the study be determined?

Girls ages 13-14 are eligible to participate.

What are the possible risks and discomforts of this study?

There is little risk involved in this study. Girls will only be asked questions about how they perceive their futures. No questions are intended to expose the children to legal or emotional harm. The major potential risk is a breach of confidentiality, but the researcher will do everything possible to protect your adolescent's privacy. To reduce the likelihood of that happening, the researcher has been thoroughly trained to maintain your adolescent's privacy. This study is completely voluntary. Your adolescent may choose not to participate or not to answer any questions during the study.

Will my adolescent benefit from taking part in this study?

Your adolescent may not receive any direct benefits from participating but possible benefits are that she may learn more about her own future goals a result of participating in this study. In addition, policymakers, guidance counselors, and organizations that work with girls may learn more about addressing the career development needs of the girls they serve.

Are there any costs to me or my adolescent if she participates in this study?

There are no costs to you or your adolescent for participating in this study.

How much will my adolescent be paid if she completes this study?

There are no payments to you or your adolescent for participating in this study.

Will anyone know that my adolescent is taking part in this study?

All records pertaining to your adolescent's involvement in this study are kept strictly confidential (private) and any data that includes your adolescent's identity will be stored in locked files at all times. The focus groups and interviews will be tape-recorded and the tapes will also be stored in a locked file cabinet. At the end of this study, any records that personally identify your adolescent will remain stored in locked files and will be kept for a minimum of five years. Your adolescent's name will be replaced with a fictitious name in any description or publications of this research. In unusual cases, your research records may be released in response to an order from a court of law. It is also possible that authorized representatives from the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office or the University of Pittsburgh IRB, may review the data for the purpose of monitoring the conduct of this study. Also, if I learn that your adolescent or someone with whom your adolescent is involved is in serious danger of potential harm, I will need to inform the appropriate agencies, as required by Pennsylvania law.

Is my adolescent's participation in this study voluntary?

Yes! Your adolescent's participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to allow your adolescent to take part in it, or your adolescent may stop participating at any time, even after signing this form.

How can I get more information about this study?

If you have any further questions about this research study, you may contact the investigators listed at the beginning of this consent form. If you have any questions about your rights as a

research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate at the University of Pittsburgh IRB Office, 1.866.212.2668.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

All of the above has been explained to me and my adolescent and all of my current questions have been answered. I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that such future questions will be answered by the researchers listed on the first page of this form. Any questions I have about my adolescent's rights as a research participant will be answered by the Human Subject Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh (1-866-212-2668).

I understand that, as a minor (age less than 18 years), my adolescent is not permitted to participate in this research study without my consent. Therefore, by signing this form, I give my consent for his/her participation in this research study.

Parent's Name (Print)

Telephone number

Parent's Signature

Date

The research has been explained to me, and I agree to participate.

Adolescent Participant

Adolescent Participant's Signature

Date

CERTIFICATION OF INFORMED CONSENT COMPLETED BY RESEARCHER

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the above-named individual(s), and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individual(s) have about this study have been answered, and I will always be available to address future questions as they arise.

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Role in Research Study

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

B. 5 CONSENT FORM FOR MOTHERS IN SNOWBALL SAMPLE

Approval Date: October 20, 2006
Renewal Date: October 19, 2007
University of Pittsburgh
Institutional Review Board
IRB Number: #0609113

CONSENT TO ACT AS A SUBJECT IN A RESEARCH STUDY-Mothers

TITLE: Whatever Her Little Heart Desires-Phase Two

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Melissa Swauger, MA, Sociology
2400 Posvar Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15213; Phone: 412) 648-7580
e-mail: mls30@pitt.edu

CO-INVESTIGATORS: Kathleen Blee, PhD, Sociology
2400 Posvar Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15213;
Phone: 412) 648-7580

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: None

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to examine how adolescent girls perceive their futures and the resources they use to plan their futures.

Who is being asked to take part in this study?

Mothers of girls ages 13-14 are being asked to participate.

What procedures will be performed for research purposes?

If you decide to complete, sign, and return this consent form, you are agreeing participate in an interview to discuss your daughter's perceptions about the future. Interviews will be conducted at your home, between February and May, 2007. During the interviews you will be asked about your involvement in your child's education and decision-making, your knowledge of your child's future aspirations, and the resources you use to gain information about careers to relay to your child. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes of your time. Interviews will be conducted at your convenience. All interviews will be tape-recorded.

How will my eligibility for the study be determined?

Mothers of girls, ages 13-14 will be eligible to participate.

What are the possible risks and discomforts of this study?

There is little risk involved in this study. You will only be asked questions about your daughter's future and how you help your daughter make decisions about the future. No questions are intended to expose you to legal or emotional harm. The major potential risk is a breach of confidentiality, but the researcher will do everything possible to protect your child's privacy. To reduce the likelihood of that happening, the researcher has been thoroughly trained to maintain your privacy. This study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or not to answer any questions during the study. Your decision to participate will not affect your or your child's standing with Sarah Heinz House.

Will I benefit from taking part in this study?

You may not receive any direct benefits from participating but possible benefits are that you may learn more about planning for your child's future by participating in this study. In addition, policymakers, guidance counselors, and organizations that work with girls may learn more about addressing the career development needs of the girls and mothers they serve.

Are there any costs to me for participating in this study?

There are no costs to you for participating in this study.

How much will I be paid if I complete this study?

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Will anyone know that I am taking part in this study?

All records pertaining to your involvement in this study are kept strictly confidential (private) and any data that includes your identity will be stored in locked files at all times. The interviews will be tape-recorded and the tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet. At the end of this study, any records that personally identify you will remain stored in locked files and will be kept for a minimum of five years. Your name will be replaced with a fictitious name in any description or publications of this research. In unusual cases, your research records may be released in response to an order from a court of law. It is also possible that authorized representatives from the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office or the University of Pittsburgh IRB may review the data for the purpose of monitoring the conduct of this study. Also, if I learn that you or someone with whom you are involved is in serious danger of potential harm, I will need to inform the appropriate agencies, as required by Pennsylvania law.

Is my participation in this study voluntary?

Yes! Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to take part, or you may stop participating at any time, even after signing this form.

How can I get more information about this study?

If you have any further questions about this research study, you may contact the investigators listed at the beginning of this consent form. If you have any questions about your rights as a

research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate at the University of Pittsburgh IRB Office, 1.866.212.2668.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

All of the above has been explained to me and all of my current questions have been answered. I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that such future questions will be answered by the researchers listed on the first page of this form. Any questions I have about my rights as a research participant will be answered by the Human Subject Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh (1-866-212-2668).

By signing this form, I give my consent to participate in this research study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Telephone number

RESEARCHER COMPLETES THE FOLLOWING SECTION:

CERTIFICATION of INFORMED CONSENT

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the above-named individual(s), and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individual(s) have about this study have been answered, and I will always be available to address future questions as they arise.

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Role in Research Study

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX C-INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRES

C. 1 FOCUS GROUPS WITH GIRLS

Opening question-give all girls an opportunity to talk up front and make them feel comfortable.

- Have each girl introduce herself and ask why she agreed to participate in the project.

Introductory questions-introduces the topic of discussion and get them to start thinking about their connection with the topic.

- What does it mean to be successful?
 - Who do you know that is successful? Why are they successful? What did they do?
 - What kinds of things do people have that show they are successful?
 - What do people have to do to gain success?
 - Do only famous people get to be successful?
- What does it mean to be rich? How do people get rich?
- What does it mean to be poor? Why are people poor?
- Do all people have the same chance to grow up and get what they want?
- Are some people more likely to get ahead or reach their goals than others?
- Do girls have to worry about anything that boys don't or vice versa?

Transition questions-move conversation into key questions that drive the study and help participants become aware of how others view the topic

- In your own life, what kinds of things will make for a good future? Which girls are likely to have those kinds of futures?
- What kinds of things make for a bad future? What kinds of girls are likely to have those kinds of futures?
- Will it be easy or hard for you and your friends to have a good future? What will make it easy? What will make it hard?
- What things do girls your age worry about for their future?

Key questions-questions that require the greatest attention to analysis

- I would like to go around the group and have each of you tell the career or job you would like to have when you finish school?
- Why do you want to be a _____? How did you learn about that career?
- What do you know about this career? What do you think would be good or bad about it?
- Is it important for girls your age to plan for their futures now?
- What could girls your age do now to plan for their future? Does anyone you know do these things? Who? Who doesn't and why?
- Are there certain courses a girls should take now to reach her career goals?

Ending questions-brings closure to discussion, enables participants to reflect on previous comments...can be "all things considered," summary question, or final question.

- What advice would you give to a girl your age about how to plan for her future?
- What do girls your age need to help them reach their goals?

C. 2 INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WITH GIRLS

Girls' everyday concerns

- Describe what a typical weekday looks like for you? (home/school responsibilities, work, activities, leisure—gives insight to adolescent lifestyle)
- What is most important to you in your life?
- Who do you spend most of your time with? What do you do?
- Are your friends like you? How are they different?
- What adults are most important in your life? Why?
- Who do you admire? Is there anyone you want to be like?
- Do you like school? How does what you do in school now relate to your future?
- How much TV do you watch? Is there anything on TV that makes you think about your future?
- How would you describe yourself? What special gifts or talents do you have?

Perceptions of the future

- At what age do you think it's important to begin thinking about career goals? At what age is it important for a person to actually take steps (classes, gathering information) toward a career?
- How could you/can you begin to plan for a career now in 8th grade?
- What will your life be like in two years, when you are 15-16?
- How about right after you graduate high school?
- Are you seeking advice to make those plans? Where/from whom?
- Describe what a typical day will look like for you when you are 25? 30?
- Where would you like to live when you finish your education?
- What kinds of things do you expect to have when you finish your education?
- What do you think your own family will look like?

Parents/mothers messages about the future

- What's a typical day like for your parents?
- What do you think parents worry about most?

- What kind of work does your mother do? How does she feel about her job? What does she tell you about her job? Is she treated fairly at work? At home? How do you feel about her job?
- What expectations does your mother have of you? What does she do to help you plan for the future?
- Do you want to have a life like your parents?

Resources

- Where do you get ideas about the future?
- Who helps you decide what classes you will take at school?
- Do you talk to anyone about jobs you want when you finish school? Parents, friends, teachers, etc?
- You said you would like to be a _____, what classes do you need to take for that career? Where can you get a job like that? What strategies would you employ to reach your goals? Where would you go for resources?
- What could prevent you from achieving this goal? What unexpected things could happen? Who/where would you turn for advice?

Perceptions of equality

- Do you think you have the same chance as all young people your age to grow up and be/do what they want? The same chance as a boy? As someone of a different race?

C.3 MOTHERS' INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Mothers' general knowledge of girls' academic and future aspirations

- Do you know what your child wants to be when she grows up?
- How do you feel about your child's career aspirations?
- What factors do you think influenced your child's aspirations?
- How often do you and your daughter ever have discussions about her future career goals?
- Do you know anyone who is in the same occupation to which your child aspires?

Mother's Messages

- What is your occupation? How do you feel about your job?
- What do you tell your daughter about your job?
- How have your own work and life experiences contributed to what you tell your daughter about her future?
- When you were your daughters' age, what did you want to be? Did you reach that goal? Why/why not?
- Does your daughter do well in school?
- How important do you feel the courses a child her age takes are for their future careers?
- In your view is there a connection between her current schooling and her future career?
- If you are unsure about a question your child has in school or about taking classes who do you ask for help?
- If you are unsure about a question your child has about careers, how would/do you find out the answer?

Mothers as models

- What do you think your daughter would say about your job?
- Do you think your daughter would want your job?
- What role do you see yourself playing in shaping your child's future?
- Who or what do you think plays the biggest role in helping your child shape her career?

Barriers

- Do you think your child can attain her goals?
- What barriers might the child run into?
- If barriers, how do you think you would help your child?
- What unexpected things could happen to your daughter to prevent her from reaching her goals?
- How would you help her? Who/where would you turn for advice?

Mothers' perceptions of equality

- Do all young people have the same chance to grow up and be/do what they want?
- Are some people more likely to get ahead or reach their goals than others?
- Do girls have to worry about anything that boys don't have to worry about when thinking about their future?
- Do you believe there are certain jobs only for men or women? What do you tell your daughter about jobs for women and men?
- Would your family face economic challenges in helping her reach her goals?
- Do you ever talk to your daughter about her race in relation to reaching her goals?

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